TELOS

NUMBER 115 SPRING 1999

Articles:

David Pan: Adorno's Aesthetics of Myth
Russell A. Berman: Religion and Critical Theory
Rick Johnstone: Purges and Pacts
Anthony King: Legitimating Post-Fordism
John W. Tate: Posting Modernity to the Past?

Notes, Documents and Commentaries:

Simon Oliver: Theology as Pseudo-Ecology?
Kaveh L. Afrasiabi: On "The Clash of Civilizations"
Benoist & Champetier: The French New Right in 2000
Peter Schneider: Intervention in Kosovo
Rick Johnstone: The Lessons of Auschwitz and Uri

Reviews:

G. L. Ulmen: On the "Dark Continent"
Paul Piccone: The Obsolescence of Utopia
Catherine Pickstock: Civil Society and its Discontents
John Bokina: Heidegger, with a Difference
Sophie Berman: Back to Sanity
Curtis L. Hancock: Transcendental Sophistry

US: $12 *Canada: $15*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Telos

Editor: *Paul Piccone* Notes Editor: *Gary L. Ulmen*
Book Review Editor: *Michael Taves* Managing Editor: *Lauren Alleyne*

Editorial Associates: *Frank Adler, Russell Berman, John Bokina, Robert D'Amico, Alex Delfini, Paul Gottfried, Moishe Gonzales, David Gross, Russell Jacoby, Tim Luke, David Ost, David Pan, Catherine Pickstock, Gabor Rittersporn, G. L. Ulmen, Florindo Volpacchio, Victor Zaslavsky.*

Manuscript Editor: *Antina von Schnitzler*

*****

Subscription Rates

One-year Individual . . . $40.00 One-year Institutional $95.00
Two-years Individual . . . $80.00 Two-years Institutional. . . .$190.00
(Foreign Subscribers, including Canadians, add 15%)

*****

Back Issues available: ns. 13, 17-18 20-51, 53-113 at $14.00 each ($30.00 for institutions). Foreign orders, add 15%. For the "Table of Contents" of all back issues, see our Web site. All payments must be in U.S. currency. Out of print issues (ns. 1-12, 14-16, 19, 52) can be obtained in microform or facsimile through University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106, US.

Telos number 115 corresponds to Vol. 31, No. 1. ***Telos*** is published in the Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter by Telos Press Ltd. Periodicals postage paid at New York and additional mailing offices. Send address changes and inquiries to:

Telos
431 E. 12th Street, New York, NY 10009
© 1998, Telos Press Ltd. ISSN 0090-6514
Tel.: # 212-228-6479 Fax: # 212-228-6379 e-mail: telospress@aol.com
Web site: http/www.angelfire.com/biz/telospress/index.html

Subscribers can now participate, free of charge, in the *Telos Forum* — an electronic discussion group for readers, collaborators and editors to share ideas, complaints, criticisms, etc. To subscribe, send e-mail to **majordomo@www.ithaca.edu**, with only the following line in the body of your e-mail message: "**subscribe telos-forum your e-mail address**." You will receive an automated welcome message which explains how to participate in the *Telos Forum.*

Unsolicited manuscripts will be considered only if the author provides at least three clean, finished copies conforming to the appropriate Telos style, or an IBM-compatible computer diskette. Allow at least three months for editorial evaluation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TELOS

Number 115 **Spring 1999**

Articles:

Introduction....3
Paul Piccone

Adorno's Failed Aesthetics of Myth....7
David Pan

From Brecht to Schleiermacher:
Religion and Critical Theory....36
Russell A. Berman

Ethnic Purges and Neighborly Pacts:....49
Reflections on a Swiss Statue
Rick Johnstone

Legitimating Post-Fordism:
A Critique of Anthony Giddens' Later Works....60
Anthony King

Posting Modernity to the Past?....79
John W. Tate

Notes, Documents and Commentaries:

Theology as a Pseudo-Ecology?
Reply to Manussos Marangudakis....95
Simon Oliver

From "The Clash of Civilizations"
to "Civilizational Parallelism"....109
Kaveh L. Afrasiabi

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The French New Right in the Year 2000.....117
Alain de Benoist and *Charles Champetier*

Intervention in Kosovo.....145
Peter Schneider

The Lessons of Auschwitz and the Lessons of Uri:
Brief Comments on the Telos Symposium on Kosovo.....148
Rick Johnstone

Reviews:

The Dialectic of Enlightenment
and the "Dark Continent".....151
G. L. Ulmen

The Obsolescence of Utopia.....161
Paul Piccone

Civil Society and its Discontents.....176
Catherine Pickstock

Heidegger Again, but with a Difference.....179
John Bokina

Back to Sanity.....185
Sophie Berman

Transcendental Sophistry.....190
Curtis L. Hancock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Introduction

Given that the modernist narrative seems inexorably headed for Chapter 11, the search for alternatives tends to turn, first and foremost, to allegedly transcended, "pre-modern" models of social organization. This helps explain not only the thriving, but also a return to religion and tradition. This state of affairs is routinely used to relegitimate the faltering of such an *obviously* "emancipatory" undertaking as the modernist project by reinforcing standard modernist theodicy, according to which all evil is a function of "greed" and, most of all, the persistence of "superstition and myth," i.e., religion and tradition. Cause and effect are reversed: the project is presumably waffling, precisely because of the persistence and resurgence of these terminally obsolete, pre-modern residues. Thus, instead of precipitating a rethinking of modernism, this self-serving reading of its crisis leads to renewed attempts to complete the project, resulting in an acceleration of the very process of social decomposition responsible for its creeping delegitimation. In particular, the scapegoating of religion reconfigures it as a social pathology in need of therapy, rather than warranting serious theoretical attention. However, as Russell Berman argues in "Religion and Critical Theory," through an elaboration of Schleiermacher's and Brecht's respective positions, the reduction of religion to pathology (and its subsequent exclusion from serious theoretical consideration) also tends to restrict radical visions and diminish the scope of any Critical Theory that accepts these conformist blinders.

Such a warning is warranted by the fact that, despite all their fulminations about negations and refusals, most critical theorists have not managed to avoid the occupational hazards of modernist intellectuals. This is true not only in the obvious case of its illegitimate loquacious progeny, which wishes to reduce all problems to communicative dysfunctions, but also of the very "founding fathers" of Critical Theory. While much more aware of the centrality of the theological dimension than subsequent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

generations, even they succumbed to the sirens of modernism and subsumed this dimension within a dualist, modernist ontology, in which nature is deployed as the measure of a history whose *telos* remains the reconciliation of the two. It does not work. As David Pan shows in "Adorno's Failed Aesthetic of Myth," the struggle to prefigure an alternative to the dialectic of enlightenment through aesthetic theory ultimately capitulates to the very enlightenment model Adorno sought to transcend. What Critical Theory never managed to do is to come to terms with the conceptually inaccessible totality that myth attempts to capture and translate into a living experience promising that otherwise elusive reconciliation longed for not only by Adorno but, as Pan argues, by humanity as such. This is a call not for a return to any particular religious dogmatism, whose first task has usually been to make sure that every culture achieved its particular institutional configuration of how to deal with reconciliation, but for a realization of the futility of any political arrangement that assumes this longing for reconciliation can be eliminated either by privatization or by reducing it to a social pathology.

But the universality of this predicament does not allow for a universal solution. To the extent that the mediation between subject and totality can be carried out only by culturally specific forms, the institutionalization of religious practices will always have to remain highly idiosyncratic. This is why, in their more reflexive self-definitions, even highly centralized religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church, operationalize their universality in terms of a *complexio oppositorum* where local parishes, with their own particular cultures, Saint protectors and liturgical practices take priority over an essential, yet distant and often inaccessible theological horizon. The major crises of Christianity, which have historically resulted in splits, fragmentation, and disintegration, have usually followed attempted power shifts from the periphery to the center — precisely the same logic that, during the last couple of centuries, has characterized the dynamics of nation-states. Today, after the defrosting of politics in the wake of the end of the Cold War, the rationality and legitimation crises of bureaucratic centralist regimes everywhere replicates the earlier dynamics of Christianity. The disintegration of the weakest of these regimes results in internal struggles as violent and destructive as any of the religious wars. To a great extent, this exercise in political theology helps explain the catastrophes of Nigeria, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, etc. as secular variations of the same phenomenon.

By contrast, Rick Johnstone's "Reflections on a Swiss Statue" argues

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that no "ethnic cleansing" or its equivalents have happened, or could have happened, in Switzerland since the original cantons first federated in 1291. This is due not only to geography, but also to the kind of political arrangements that have made Switzerland the world's most peaceful, long-lasting and successful political entity. Unlike "mass" democracy, where the masses are manipulated by the media, the culture industry, economic power, etc., the kind of genuine democratic institutions developed by the Swiss are possible only within local contexts, unencumbered by powerful central bureaucracies. Johnstone insists on "human rights" as the *sine qua non conditio* for generalizing such a successful model. Yet, they do not seem to have played any role in Swiss history; they can only make a difference when backed by the appropriate military clout; and, theoretically, they are no more defensible than any other particular value. This says nothing about their desirability, but only that they constitute a *particular value*, rather than a regulative political concept or a universally valid metaphysical necessity. Contrary to Johnstone's laudable political intentions, when "human rights" cease to be a particular value and are transubstantiated into a universally-valid metaphysical necessity (as has become routine within US foreign policy) the result is a new and improved form of cultural imperialism, as well as a tool to bring about the kind of all-embracing one-world government Johnstone otherwise warns against.

Apparently, "human rights" have been restored in Kosovo (although not in Chechnya, Kurdistan, Tibet and elsewhere) not because of their universal validity, but because NATO had enough power and will to force them down Milosevic's throat, who still remains unconvinced of their normative superiority. In defending "Intervention in Kosovo" — a contribution to a symposium which had to be aborted once the war ended and the question became moot — Peter Schneider drives this point home convincingly: it is impossible to restrict the protection of human rights to the citizens of Western democracies. What it ultimately boils down to is neither metaphysical necessity nor, as European born-again peaceniks argued in yet another unsuccessful effort to universalize their traditional anti-Americanism, an attempt to control European politics — something the US has been doing since WWII, despite de Gaulle and the various national communist parties. Rather, it *should* have been a function of a particular decision by the leadership of countries constitutionally committed to "human rights."

Here, it is essential to emphasize the "should," since in fact what happened was more a function of a bungled US foreign policy by a leadership

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

embroiled in sex scandals and impeachment proceedings, "damage control" to prevent previous mistakes from having even more catastrophic consequences, the paralysis of European governments, NATO's identity crisis, etc., than of any principled position. This was clear even before Taiwan began to advocate a "two Chinas" policy or the Chechens provoked the Russians into taking back from them those "human rights" now presumably enjoyed by the Kosovars, etc. The same can be said for the European peaceniks' "anti-imperialism," which apparently no longer extends to Chechnya, Kurdistan, or Taiwan and Tibet. Since it is difficult to blame the US for what is happening in these places, it is now back to business as usual. While they may still "want peace," they are now more likely to settle for another cappuccino.

There is nothing surprising about this. As Anthony King shows in his critique of Anthony Giddens, this is part of the new "reflexive subjectivity" in post-traditional society. The plastic, free-floating individual of post-Fordism, celebrated in Giddens' work, not only serves to provide an apology for existing relations of domination, but systematically occludes the more destructive aspects of modernity. This is a sociological version of the kind of philosophical pictures painted by Habermas, who saw modernity as a normative project, and Foucault, for whom anything went. John W. Tate reconstructs their old debate regarding the status of modernity and concludes that, whether one accepts or rejects Enlightenment mandates is ultimately a matter of choice, which is tantamount to say that the gig is up: modernity may well remain the contemporary horizon, but that means nothing. One can buy into it, or not, in the same way the new plastic individual can buy this or that pair of shoes — or realize that one's identity is one's history and traditions, and choose oneself over other alternatives. Such a choice appears all the more rational, in view of the fact that, without traditional moorings, the plastic individual ends up melting into nothingness, since intergenerational reproduction in the new post-Fordist society becomes increasingly difficult.

Also included in this issue is the program of the French New Right, most of whose ideas were critically discussed in *Telos* 98-99, a reply to Marangudakis' analysis of the ecological crisis, and several reviews of recent works bearing on all of the previously mentioned topics.

Paul Piccone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Adorno's Failed Aesthetics of Myth**

David Pan

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that reason, which claims to lead to truth, is always instrumental reason — a form of domination based on violence. Enlightenment, which aspired to emancipate society from the violence of myth, ends by reenacting this violence and turning back into myth.[2] Jürgen Habermas attacks this argument for falling prey to an unbridled scepticism that fails to appreciate the achievements of modernity.[3] For him, Horkheimer's and Adorno's radical critique of reason is analogous to Nietzsche's critique of science and morals in *On the Genealogy of Morality* to the extent that a claim to truth is unmasked as ideology — a form of power (PD 120-26). Because such a critique assumes a difference between truth and power, when Nietzsche, Horkheimer and Adorno carry out such a critique of the concept of reason as a basis for truth, they risk undermining the distinction on which their whole critique is based.

Habermas outlines how Nietzsche, Horkheimer and Adorno pursue two alternative courses in dealing with this contradiction, both of which lead to an aesthetic understanding of truth that fails to recognize "the traces and the existing forms of communicative rationality" (PD 129). With respect to Nietzsche, Habermas argues that the aestheticization of truth

* Parts of this article have appeared previously in David Pan, "Instrumentalizing the Sacred: From Alfred Bäumler to Manfred Frank" in *Wendezeiten — Zeitenwenden: Positionsbestimmungen zur deutschsprachigen Literatur 1945-1995*, ed. by Robert Weninger and Brigitte Rossbacher (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1997), pp. 233-247.

2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), pp. 11-14. Cited hereafter as DE.

3. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, tr. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1987), p. 121. Cited hereafter as PD.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

destroys the concept of truth. What remains is a theory of power in which the world falls "back into myth, in which powers influence one another and no element remains that could transcend the battle of the powers" (PD 125). But Horkheimer and Adorno, remain bound within a paradoxical situation of continual, determinate negation in which all theoretical solutions are rejected. Consequently, Adorno's late philosophy becomes a hermetic and circular movement between paradox and artistic mimesis, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* (PD 128- 29). While Nietzsche's version of aestheticization destroys truth by merging it with power, Adorno's rejection of theoretical solutions amounts to a surrender to the rule of power.

Habermas' alternative is to develop an idea of communicative rationality in which values are separate from empirical considerations and thus free of power dynamics. They are determined only by "the unforced force of the better argument" (PD 130). He assumes that modernity has divided truth into three different spheres — science, morality, and art — and that "expert cultures" within each are able to collectively arrive at intersubjectively valid judgments. Yet, because truth is attained only within these expert cultures, there is a danger that the isolation of truth within research communities will lead truth claims, to become "esoteric in character and endangered in being split off from ordinary communicative practice" (PD 113).

This separation of truth from everyday life is precisely the problem that Nietzsche's, Horkheimer's and Adorno's aesthetic understandings of truth attempt to address. Whereas Habermas links art in the modern world to the emancipation of the subject "from the imperatives of purposive action and from the conventions of quotidian perception" (PD 113), for them, art must remain involved in everyday life in order to maintain a strong connection between truth and experience. The link between the experience of art and everyday experience is essential, because they conceive of moral truth, not as the special preserve of researchers and philosophers who speak as representatives of the rest of society, but as imbedded in the personal experiences of all people. Since they assume that moral truth grounded in experience cannot be based on reason, which is objective and abstract, Nietzsche, Horkheimer, and Adorno turn to art as the carrier of a specifically aesthetic form of truth that maintains an intimate link to subjectivity and particularity. Because beauty and the sublime cannot be constructed intersubjectively by means of arguments and dialogue, but must be received through a process of inspiration, art provides an opening to a type of truth that is given, rather than constructed, intuited, rather than proven.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet, this aesthetic form of truth is not arbitrary, i.e., dominated by power and manipulation as Habermas suspects (PD 124-25). Instead, as Peter Uwe Hohendahl has demonstrated, Horkheimer and Adorno envision an aesthetic mode of truth that, though not based on reason, has its own basis for legitimacy: mimesis.[4] They describe mimesis as the specific method of myth as opposed to science. In contrast to reason, which reduces all of nature to an undifferentiated raw material, "[t]he world of magic retained distinctions whose traces have disappeared even in linguistic form. . . . Like science, magic pursues aims, but seeks to achieve them by mimesis — not by progressively distancing itself from the object." (DE 10-11) Whereas Habermas understands myth only as violence and domination, this view of magic as mimesis emphasizes the positive aspect of myth. Not only does magic still maintain the qualitative differences in nature that have been eradicated by science, but it provides a way of relating to nature and experience that is based on imitation rather than manipulation. From this viewpoint, the modern separation of value spheres, which Habermas contends is the basis for intersubjective truth, destroys the totality of experience created by myth. The mythic unity of cognition and mimesis has become fragmented into the mutually exclusive spheres of science and art in the modern world. Neither is able to mediate to the individual an experience of totality. Instead, truth has been separated from sensual experience, and everyday experience no longer has truth value (DE 17-18).

Horkheimer's and Adorno's outline of an aesthetic understanding of truth attempts to overcome this alienation and to reconstruct the totality within the particular: "It is in the nature of the work of art, or aesthetic semblance, to be what the new, terrifying occurrence became in the primitive's magic: the appearance of the whole in the particular" (DE 19). By leading art back toward the mythic function of magic, they seek to recover a totality for subjective experience and with it an experience of the absolute and of ultimate values that has been lost with the domination of reason. The mythic totality they envision is not a rational totality, in which "[d]isqualified nature becomes the chaotic matter of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes mere possession — abstract identity," but an aesthetic totality based on "specific representation" and the particularity (rather than the exchangeability) of human experience (DE 10). This distinction between a rational totality and an aesthetic totality is crucial for

4. Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 205-209 and 241-42.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conceiving of a culture free of reification, in which the specificity of individual experience is not eliminated to make way for the universal domination of reason.[5]

For Horkheimer and Adorno, 20th century works of art are attempts to create the mythic experience of totality in a modern situation, where myths have lost their validity. The contradiction between mythic totality and modern alienation becomes the defining one for modern art. Yet, the differentiation between a modern art of alienation and a mythic experience of totality raises a fundamental problem concerning the status of myth. Because Horkheimer and Adorno assume a fatal dialectic of culture in which myth is overtaken by enlightenment, but in which simultaneously enlightenment turns back into myth (DE 11-14), they are unable to imagine the possibility of a positive return to myth. Modern art, because it is predicated on a situation of alienation, cannot be a model for a return to a mythic totality. Instead, it is shot through with the same contradictions that have created the modern experience of alienation of truth from experience (and thus its transformation into falsehood) in the first place. An overcoming of this alienation would suggest either a replacement of modern art with myth as a mediator of truth and experience or a reevaluation of modern art as a contemporary form of myth. But the idea of a dialectic, in which myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment turns into myth, undermines the possibility of establishing a stable mythic totality.

Horkheimer and Adorno are left in a predicament similar to Habermas when it comes to an evaluation of the status of art and myth. Art must remain isolated from life in order to maintain its negative character in relation to the alienation that pervades everyday experience. In the end, a mythic totality is impossible in the modern world for Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno. For the former, the loss of totality is a sign of progress in the creation of expert cultures capable of determining intersubjective validity. For the latter, this loss is the cause of a permanent alienation of truth from individual experience. Because art can no longer function in the same way as myth once did, myth is relegated to an irretrievable past.

Though *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides a critique of enlightenment that leaves the metaphysical dimension of myth and religion as the only alternative to the alienation of modernity, Adorno is unable to build upon this critique of modernity. In his subsequent work, he attempts to

5. For a more elaborate description of this distinction between a rational and an aesthetic totality, see Carl Einstein, "Totalität," in *Werke*, Vol. 1, 1908-1918, ed. by Rolf-Peter Baacke with Jens Kwasny (Berlin: Medusa, 1980), pp. 226-29.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conceive of art as a secularized version of the metaphysical experiences found in religion and myth. His dialectical method henceforth becomes a sophisticated means of equivocating between two incompatible projects: affirming the transcendent qualities of myth and religion, on the one hand, and maintaining the primacy of secular art in the establishment of a cultural tradition, on the other.

Adorno can manage to do both only by conceiving of a form of art that includes the sublime as a transcendent factor, yet does not upset the primacy of the individual as the basis of order in modernity. Because it can only reduce culture to art by retaining the individual as the center around which the totality of the world constructs itself, Adorno's concept of art is intimately linked to the individual's domination of nature — the very mechanism that he and Horkheimer criticize so effectively in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno repudiates the antimodern argument of this book that would logically lead toward myth and ritual as the basis of social order and flees into a theory of art that can never move beyond the illusion of the modern subject as the self-sufficient creator of its own identity.

The dependence of Adorno's theory of art on the individual's domination of nature becomes apparent when one compares his ideas with Nietzsche's outline of an aesthetics of myth in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Adorno clearly borrows from Nietzsche in order to develop the principal categories of his aesthetics, the distinction between Apollo and Dionysus furnishing the template with which Adorno constructs his fundamental opposition between semblance and expression as the imperatives determining the work of art.[6] Thus, both Nietzsche and Adorno insist on the importance of the semblance character of art as the element that maintains art's distinctiveness. Nietzsche explains how the task of the chorus in Greek tragedy is to transform the theatrical experience into an event divorced from the mundane world around it.[7] Similarly, for Adorno, if the

6. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, tr. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 100-118. Cited hereafter as AT. For an analysis of Adorno's distinction between semblance and expression, see Robert Hullot-Kentor, "The Impossibility of Music: Adorno, Popular and Other Music," *Telos* 87 (Spring 1991), pp. 97-117. Cf. also Walter Benjamin's idea of mimesis as a recognition of "ingenuous similarity." Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz, tr. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986), p. 334. For a discussion of the relation between Benjamin's and Adorno's concepts of mimesis, see Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1997), pp. 137-180.

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, tr. by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 38.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work of art does not retain some element of semblance and thus its distinction from the world of things, it becomes an everyday object that has been functionalized and objectified like all other objects (AT 103).

While the work of art for both must maintain its distinction from the world of objects around it, it must also transcend this isolation in order to avoid becoming mere illusion. Just as Nietzsche's concept of the Apollonian reappears in Adorno's work as "semblance," Adorno's concept of expression exhibits the same characteristics as Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian. Both expression for Adorno and the Dionysian for Nietzsche function to bring reality into the illusory sphere of art, thereby transcending the Apollonian semblance. As with Nietzsche, for Adorno the reality of aesthetic images does not lie in their representational value, in their direct presentation of an image from history or from the experiences of the artist. Instead of entering the work of art as representation (for example, in an "historical novel"), reality enters the work of art through its inner form. For both, the structure of conflicting forces within the work of art creates a specific type of "imitation" that is to be distinguished from direct representation. "[Art's] expression is the antithesis of expressing something" (AT 112). Rather than representing pathos, art imitates it through a mimetic process. Adorno differentiates a communicative from a mimetic aspect of language and relates expression to mimetic language: "The new art tries to bring about the transformation of communicative into mimetic language" (AT 112). While communicative language is representational and depends on the relation between sign and referent, mimetic language emphasizes the constellation of signs in which the referent of each sign is less important than how the constellation as a whole creates a familiar experience for the recipient.[8]

The close tie between Adorno's concept of mimesis and Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian derives from their common return to a pre-Socratic concept of mimesis that "originated with the rituals and mysteries of the Dionysian cult" and signified expression rather than reproduction.[9] Resembling the transformation of reality created by Dionysian

8. On this distinction, see Hohendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-42 and Nicholsen *op. cit.*, pp. 66-73.

9. W. Tatarkiewicz, "Mimesis," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, ed. by Philip W. Wiener, Vol. 3 (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 226. In noting this origin of the term, Martin Jay fails to draw any consequences for Adorno's notion of mimesis. Martin Jay, "Mimesis in Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, ed. by Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rituals, the task of both mimesis for Adorno and the Dionysian for Nietzsche is to return the world to a state of nonobjectification. In order to designate this state, Nietzsche speaks of the Dionysian artist's communion with the primordial unity, while Adorno refers to the thing-in-itself. In both cases art does not copy nature but rather presents things as they exist before objectification into discrete entities and concepts (AT 63).

Because art refers to this nonobjectified dimension, in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche depicts it as a metaphysical activity. The reenactment of processes outside the work of art occurs as individual artists transcend their own subjectivity by merging with a primordial unity: "In the first instance the lyric poet, a Dionysiac artist, has become entirely at one with the primordial unity, with its pain and contradiction, and he produces a copy of this primordial unity as music, which has been described elsewhere, quite rightly, as a repetition of the world and a second copy of it."[10] The artist's subjectivity merges with processes occurring outside the work of art. In transforming the world into this preconceptual state, mimesis and the Dionysian open the work of art to a metaphysical reality. But, because the primordial unity expresses itself as irresolvable pain and contradiction, Nietzsche refers to this mythic mimesis as an inescapable conflict between the individuation and the dissolution of the subject.

For Nietzsche, such a mimesis of nature implies the destruction and pain of a total dissolution of all individuation. As a consequence, "the entire opposition between the subjective and the objective . . . is absolutely inappropriate in aesthetics since the subject, the willing individual in pursuit of his own egotistical goals, can only be considered the opponent of art and not its origin."[11] As opposed to Nietzsche, Adorno attempts to confine nature within the opposition between subject and object (and thus to the limits of the subject) by referring, not to primordial unity, but to a "primacy of the object in subjective experience" (AT 71). Because Adorno's formulation retains the categories of subject and object rather than referring to a Dionysian dissolution of individuation and the opening to a metaphysical dimension, such as the primordial unity, his concept of art remains beholden to the subject/object split he attempts to negate. In maintaining this tie to subjectivity, he turns the work of art into a construction that can come into being only through the subject's domination over the object (AT 77). He retains this tie to subjectivity, because his concept of nature is based on a notion of reconciliation that cleanses

10. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nature of the horrifying aspects threatening both the individual's survival and the unity of its consciousness.

Aesthetic Theory attempts to take over Nietzsche's aesthetics while eliminating nature as a source of violence. Nietzsche postulates a fundamental conflict between human endeavor and the forces of nature, i.e., his lyricist reenacts the pain and contradiction of the primordial unity. Adorno attempts to deny the necessity of such conflict by assuming that aesthetic images do not set up a relation to nature, that "their reality is their historical content" (AT 85). Though for him mimesis has the same aesthetic structure as Nietzsche's Dionysian, Adorno replaces the idea of a primordial unity of nature with that of history as what transcends the work of art.[12] While Nietzsche explains the double Apollonian/Dionysian character of myth by referring to nature as contradiction, Adorno derives the double character of art as semblance and expression from the fact that art relates to history by setting itself off from empirical reality and by reenacting historical processes in the relation of aesthetic images to each other (AT 86). Rather than establishing a relation to nature, the immanent historicity that creates expression in the work of art is a mimesis of history: "The latent processes in artworks, which break through in the instant, are their inner historicity, sedimented external history" (AT 85-86). The inner historicity and formal processes of the work of art are a reenactment on its own terms of experiences that take place outside of the work of art in the realm of history.

Frederic Jameson has argued that Adorno's chief contribution to philosophy and aesthetics consists of this "transcoding" of both philosophical and aesthetic questions into "substantive socioeconomic ones."[13] But in claiming "that aesthetics always leads back to history itself, and that for art the 'non-identical' is society,"[14] Jameson reproduces Adorno's suppression of any fundamental contradiction between man and nature. In replacing nature with history as the place of the nonidentical, they domesticate

12. Norbert Bolz also notes this difference between Nietzsche's and Adorno's theories of art, but then goes on to criticize Nietzsche for a lack of "historico-philosophical" understanding. The key issue, however, is how Adorno uses the idea of history in order to escape the contradictions posed by nature. See Norbert W. Bolz, "Nietzsches Spur in der Ästhetischen Theorie," in *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie: Theodor W. Adornos Konstruktion der Moderne*, ed. by Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 390.

13. Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), p. 239.

14. Ibid., p. 225.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the nonidentical, destroying the possibility of recognizing either alterity or transcendence, both of which depend on violence and suffering. By insisting on the historical and thus avoidable character of suffering, Adorno projects a possible utopian state in which suffering has been eradicated and desires have been fulfilled. Yet, he fails to see that this state of harmony between man and nature could only be established by eliminating the nonidentical moment in both art and reality that he wishes to save. Mimesis becomes for him an experience of reconciliation rather than contradiction and violence.[15] He reinterprets contradiction as historical and thereby argues that contradiction is ultimately avoidable and correctable. Similarly, he understands the nonidentical, not as violence, but as freedom, in order to maintain the possibility of reconciliation and utopia. Because his theory is built on the possibility of harmony between man and nature, he undermines the idea of aesthetic truth by subsuming it under the identity logic of reason rather than under the contradictions of non-identity. "The oneness of aesthetic constituents with those of cognition is, however, the unity of spirit and thus the unity of reason" (AT 138). Through this elimination of the nonidentical, Adorno's aesthetics unwittingly destroys art as mimesis.

The first step in Adorno's destruction of aesthetic truth is the turn away from the sublime and toward beauty as the fundamental category of art. Rather than emphasizing the sublime, which exceeds subjective capacities and provides an experience of the nonidentical, Adorno's aesthetics are organized around the idea of beauty, which is based on harmony with the subject. He is able to dispense with the sublime while still retaining a notion of the nonidentical by altering Kant's idea of natural beauty in order to give it a tinge of the incomprehensibility of the sublime. In Kant's analysis, beauty in nature derives from the experience of a harmony of objects with the faculties used for perceiving them: "(Independent) natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, by which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking."[16] While Kant insists on the "apparent harmony" between subject and object in the experience of beauty, Adorno notes a certain incomprehensibility in the object: "natural beauty points to the primacy of the object in subjective experience. Natural beauty

15. Nicholsen follows Adorno in making the assumption that violence can originate only from the subject and not from nature. See Nicholsen, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

16. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. 98-99. Cited hereafter as CJ.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is perceived both as authoritatively binding and as something incomprehensible that questioningly awaits its solution" (AT 71). Though this passage seems to defend the primacy of the object and of the nonidentical, and Lambert Zuidervaart reads it as such,[17] Adorno's reference to beauty rather than the sublime to designate that which exceeds the subject confines non-identity within the bounds of the object.

Incomprehensible though beauty might be in Adorno's depiction, the question it poses still "awaits a solution" that would affirm once again the subject's mastery. Adorno's revision of Kant's notion of beauty allows him to base his aesthetics on the harmony of beauty, while at the same time insisting that he includes a consideration of the nonidentical that threatens this harmony. By enclosing the nonidentical within a revised notion of beauty, rather than allowing it to remain connected with the sublime, Adorno renders harmless those forces in nature that exceed the individual's capacities. In Kant's analysis the centrality of the individual's needs for constructing beauty allows a separate consideration, within the analysis of the sublime, of those aspects of nature completely incommensurable with the individual. In differentiating beauty from the sublime, Kant is free to describe the sublime as an experience of a contradiction between human faculties and nature in which nature completely exceeds the individual and its desires: "However, in what we usually call sublime in nature there is such an utter lack of anything leading to particular objective principles and to forms of nature conforming to them, that it is rather in its chaos that nature most arouses our ideas of the sublime, or in its wildest and most ruleless disarray and devastation, provided it displays magnitude and might" (CJ 99-100).

In basing his aesthetics on beauty, Adorno avoids a serious consideration of the "disarray and devastation" that threaten human desires. This is not to say that he ignores the sublime. He recognizes that it contains the nonidentical element that his theory of art strives to recover for human experience. Despite his focus on beauty, Adorno maintains an important role for the sublime, emphasizing that modern art has attempted to take over the spiritual function that Kant attributes to it. "The sublime, which Kant reserved exclusively for nature, later became the historical constituent of art itself" (AT 196). The experience of the sublime, which for Kant

17. Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 165-66. See also Heinz Paetzold, "Adorno's Notion of Natural Beauty: A Reconsideration," in Huhn and Zuidervaart, eds., *The Semblance of Subjectivity, op. cit.*, p. 220.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was reserved for the reception of natural phenomena, becomes for Adorno the basis for the transcendence of art. "Works in which the aesthetic form, under pressure of the truth content, transcends itself occupy the position that was once held by the concept of the sublime" (AT 196).

The sublime is important for Adorno, because the relation to it points to the moment of suffering in the work of art. Just as Nietzsche's Dionysian art force is rooted in primal pain and contradiction, expression for Adorno presents objective historical suffering as that which transcends the semblance of the work of art. "Expression is the suffering countenance of artworks" (AT 111). The centrality of suffering for expression leads Adorno to the same musical model for art that Nietzsche uses in *The Birth of Tragedy.* In both cases, dissonance is the key term. While Nietzsche speaks of "musical dissonance" with reference to the Dionysian,[18] for Adorno "[d]issonance is effectively expression; the consonant and harmonious want to soften and eliminate it" (AT 110). Though Adorno's discussion of suffering and the sublime as constitutive for the work of art brings him close to Nietzsche's views, Adorno breaks with Nietzsche in attempting to separate pain from nature. Even if Adorno agrees that dissonance, rather than harmony, is the source of art's transcendence, he attempts to mitigate the implications of this insight by contending that this suffering is avoidable, because it is not a part of nature, but of history. Because, for Nietzsche, art refers to "the primordial unity, with its pain and contradiction," it mediates an experience of the chaos of nature, which is the undefined and unpredictable opposite to the human construction of laws. For Adorno, however, the suffering brought into the work of art through expression must be something man-made and correctable, originating in history, rather than being natural and inevitable, and emanating from the primordial unity.

Adorno's assumption that nature is a cipher for reconciliation, rather than contradiction, leads him to criticize Kant's linking of the sublime to nature's power. "However, by situating the sublime in overpowering grandeur and setting up the antithesis of power and powerlessness, Kant directly affirmed his unquestioning complicity with domination" (AT 199). Adorno can only accuse Kant of complicity with domination by assuming that the violence of nature is avoidable and that human endeavor can eventually force nature into unity with human desires. Adorno considers it impossible that the primordial unity might be the

18. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, op. cit.*, pp. 113-14.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

source of the expression and dissonance found in art, because nature is mute. It cannot exist as a true antagonist of human endeavor, because there is no fundamental conflict between man and nature. Adorno denies nature's power and affirms the human ability not just to subjugate nature, but also to determine the overarching totality within which nature can be assigned a peaceful role.

This denial of nature's excessive power in comparison with human capacities is the crucial assumption that separates Adorno's from Kant's and Nietzsche's concept of the sublime. Just as he refashions Kant's notion of beauty so that it includes aspects of the sublime, Adorno redefines the sublime to make it a form of beauty, and, in doing so, undermines Kant's attempt to distinguish those aspects of nature that are commensurate with human faculties from those that are not. As opposed to both Kant's and Nietzsche's emphasis on the threatening aspect of nature as the crucial element in the experience of the sublime, Adorno's separation of nature from power and restriction forces him to argue, in contrast to Kant, that the sublime presents nature as a return to an original state before the oppression of spirit: "Nature, no longer oppressed by spirit, frees itself from the miserable nexus of rank second nature and subjective sovereignty. Such emancipation would be the return of nature, and it — the counterimage of mere existence — is the sublime" (AT 197). Unable to accept the connection between nature and violence in the Kantian sublime, Adorno redefines it as an emancipation from and protest against the domination of the spirit. Nature is only threatening in Adorno's idea of the sublime to the extent that the sublime uses the threat of domination in order to project a realm of freedom from constraint: "towering mountains are eloquent not as what crushes overwhelmingly but as images of a space liberated from fetters and strictures, a liberation in which it is possible to participate" (AT 199). Because, for Adorno, the sublimity of mountains lies not in their oppressive power, but rather in the promise of a freedom from bounds and restrictions, he can understand the sublime, not as an indication of the indomitable violence of nature, but of the human capacity to attain freedom by subduing this violence.

Kant also designates the spiritual as a realm of freedom. But in doing so, he understands freedom as constituted by the experience of domination and sacrifice. The sublime consists of an acceptance of the restrictions set by nature and a consequent sacrifice of material for spiritual being. In conceiving of nature as an overwhelming power, the experience of the sublime depends on man's fear in the face of this power. "Hence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nature can count as a might, and so as dynamically sublime, for aesthetic judgment only insofar as we consider it as an object of fear" (CJ 119). Though Tom Huhn argues, in defense of Adorno, that Kant's understanding of the sublime effaces nature,[19] the contrast between Kant's recognition of nature's power and Adorno's attempt to create a reconciliation between man and nature demonstrates that it is not Kant, but Adorno who eliminates nature as an independent force from his theory.

By affirming human impotence in the face of nature's violence, Kant insists on the persistence of nature as a force beyond human control. This stance does not necessarily result in complicity with domination, as Adorno assumes. For in arguing that the experience of the power of nature in fear is the prerequisite for the experience of the sublime, Kant points out that the sublime depends primarily on the human ability to overcome subjection to the power of nature through the sacrifice of material comfort for the sake of spiritual ideals: "Hence if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength (which does not belong to nature [within us]), to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life, and because of this we regard nature's might (to which we are indeed subjected in these [natural] concerns) as yet not having such dominance over us, as persons, that we should have to bow to it if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between upholding or abandoning them. Hence nature is here called sublime [*erhaben*] merely because it elevates [*erhebt*] our imagination, [making] it exhibit those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature" (CJ 121). For Kant, the sublime is at once a recognition of the power of nature and a reaction to this power: the individual sacrifices material well-being in order to demonstrate resistance to the physical world over which nature has control. Yet, this superiority over the physical and thus over nature is only made evident to the extent that there is a willingness to sacrifice the physical for the sake of the ideal. This sacrifice demonstrates both an acceptance of and freedom from the physical constraints of nature. But, because this vision of sacrifice depends on "its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation" ("*die eigene Erhabenheit seiner Bestimmung*"), the rejection of the power of nature serves to support the sublimity, not of the subject, but of an outside determination of the subject.

19. Tom Huhn, "Kant, Adorno, and the Social Opacity of the Aesthetic," in Huhn and Zuidervaart, eds., *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Freedom from the power of nature is impossible without a sacrifice that functions as a submission to another set of rules. "By the same token, a liking for the sublime in nature is only negative (whereas a liking for the beautiful is positive); it is a feeling that the imagination by its own action is depriving itself of its freedom, in being determined purposively according to a law different from that of its empirical use. The imagination thereby acquires an expansion and a might that surpasses the one it sacrifices; but the basis of this might is concealed from it; instead the imagination feels the sacrifice or deprivation and at the same time the cause to which it is being subjugated" (CJ 129). Kant describes here the construction of a spiritual reality as the direct consequence of a confrontation with the power of nature, prefiguring Nietzsche's own derivation of an aesthetic truth from this opposition between man and nature. The material impotence of the human subject leads to its dissolution as an autonomous entity. It can only escape total annihilation by submitting to an outside law that becomes greater than materiality.

Kant's description of the sublime provides the justification for linking ethics with aesthetics. The experience of the sublime creates precisely the movement of consciousness that must occur with any ethical act. The sublime is not only significant because it recreates this movement, but because it provides the model for it. In order to create ethical actions, rather than merely a set of abstract ethical laws, a culture must impress upon its members a visceral and intimate experience of the sublimity of their actions, i.e., the dependence of their actions on an overarching spiritual framework that transcends the material world. Ethical behavior can only become a norm if all individuals feel the metaphysical cause to which their actions and aspirations are to be subordinated.

Unable to accept nature as incommensurate with desires, Adorno does not recognize the necessity of the individual's sacrifice for the construction of transcendence. Instead, he attempts to transform the Kantian sacrificial structure of the sublime into a utopian structure. As with Kant, art's negation of the material world is a spiritual event: "Only as spirit is art the antithesis of empirical reality as the determinate negation of the existing order of the world" (AT 89). This negation is not a denial of materiality itself, but only a protest against "the existing order of the world" — an historical situation in which unnecessary suffering takes place. This protest presents the possibility of an alternate world more congenial to subjective desires. Spirit in the work of art points to utopia, rather than to a divine order as the transcendent moment: "Through the irreconcilable

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

renunciation of the semblance of reconciliation, art holds fast to the promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled: This is the true consciousness of an age in which the real possibility of utopia — that given the level of productive forces the earth could here and now be paradise — converges with the possibility of total catastrophe" (AT 33).

Adorno's use of utopia, rather than the primordial unity, to describe that which transcends the immanent form of the work of art is an attempt to create transcendence without reference to the divine. Adorno shifts the origins of suffering into history in order to avoid a dependence on nature and the divine as the transcendent elements of the work of art. By considering freedom to be an historical alternative to restriction, Adorno turns it into an historical space of utopian harmony, rather than into a negative projection of a fundamental dissonance between human aspiration and natural forces. As a result, the sublime becomes a form of beauty, and beauty becomes the defining category for Adorno's aesthetics.[20]

Insofar as he must limit the extent to which nature opposes human endeavor to establish utopia as his own form of secular transcendence, Adorno destroys the possibility of non-identity. If nature is not seen as a source of discord, but of unity, it has been eliminated as an antagonist to human desires, and violence and domination must originate, not in nature, but in human mistakes that can eventually be set right. In locating violence in history, rather than in nature, Adorno is able to explain the pain and suffering expressed in the work of art as socially determined, rather than a part of nature. As a result, the reaction to suffering is not sacrifice, but social change, i.e., a conscious manipulation of history. Yet, such manipulation (i.e. creating paradise through production) depends on the presumption that true nature has been eradicated and that reification is total. The idea of utopia is not merely a reaction to reification, but actually depends upon reification in order to constitute itself. The establishment of utopia as the basis of transcendence enforces reification in society, because it replaces a transcendence of both materiality and the individual with a subjugation of nature to the individual's desires. Despite all his attempts at creating a negative dialectics that would avoid this problem, Adorno's philosophy remains based on identity and the concept, rather than on non-identity and mimesis.

Adorno is able to hide the dependence of utopia on the fact of reification

20. Cf. Albrecht Wellmer, "Adorno, Modernity, and the Sublime," in *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern*, ed. by Max Pensky (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 125.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by arguing that nature in the modern world has been replaced by the domination of the concept. For him, the non-identical is something that nature once must have been, but now is no longer. "Natural beauty is the trace of the nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity. As long as this spell prevails, the non-identical has no positive existence" (AT 73). As much as Adorno seeks to recover the nonidentical, these sentences are an example of his underlying assumption that nature as non-identical has been eradicated. But this argument is merely an historical way of denying the power of nature. It posits the total eradication of nature that the theory needs in order to cohere.

Since mimesis can only make sense as a mimesis of nature (as the non-identical and unpredictable), Adorno's presumption that nature has been totally subjugated to the concept and that only human manipulation exists as a force in reality destroys the possibility of mimesis. If mimesis is nonetheless a crucial aspect of modern art, this can only be a clue that non-identity still exists and that the idea of a total eradication of nature as non-identity is a modern delusion. If it had really been eradicated as something that goes beyond human concepts, then all of reality could be manipulated to fulfill human desires, and a state of utopia in which there is no conflict between man and nature and man rules over nature like a god would in fact exist. But as long as nature presents a threat to the fulfillment of human desires, it cannot be reduced to human concepts; it still remains unreified, and thus a source of fear and the basis for mimesis.

In assuming that in the modern world nature has been subjugated to the concept, Adorno develops an aesthetics organized around a subject-based totality with no place for aspects of nature that potentially exceed the subject. To the extent that he views nature as reconciliation, rather than contradiction, it remains trapped within identity logic and the domination of the subject. "Artworks have this much in common with idealistic philosophy: They locate reconciliation in identity with the subject" (AT 77).

This centrality of the individual in his understanding of art has become the major point of critique in subsequent analyses of the sublime. Thus, Jean-François Lyotard agrees with Kant in recognizing that the experience of the sublime is linked to the subject's sacrifice. "By sacrificing itself [in the experience of the sublime], the imagination sacrifices nature, which is aesthetically sacred, in order to exalt holy law."[21] By interpreting the sublime as "the sacrifice of the imagination," he can

21. Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, tr. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 189.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

claim that the sublime is based on a sacrilegious destruction of the aesthetic of the imagination in favor of the rationality of moral law.[22] But by opposing the moral faculty of the mind to the aesthetic imagination, Lyotard transforms the aesthetic into a natural force. Because he insists that nature is itself "aesthetically sacred," even before the sacrifice and independent of a moral law, Lyotard's reading reduces the sublime to the moment of horror and denies the possibility of any subjective reaction that could oppose this horror. If nature is itself sacred, then horror in the face of nature becomes the crucial moment in the experience of the sublime. Such a reading cannot explain the uplifting aspect of the sublime and its connection to the creation and maintenance of ethical values.

In equating the sublime with the sacred, Kant is careful to emphasize that no object is ever sublime or sacred in itself. Sacred objects do not exist, only the experience of the sacred, which occurs through the sacrifice of material objects according to the dictates of a moral law. The imagination does indeed sacrifice nature in order to exalt holy law, but it is only in this act of sacrifice that the experience of the sacred ever occurs. Moreover, this sacrifice of nature is not a sacrifice of the imagination itself, as Lyotard claims, but only of its "empirical use" (CJ 129). Imagination, in sacrificing its use in the empirical realm, "acquires an expansion and might" in the supersensual realm (CJ 129).

As opposed to Lyotard, Kant insists on the essential role of moral law in creating the aesthetic experience of the sacred. In his account spiritual values cannot exist if the sublime is reduced to the moment of fear. Though it is essential for the construction of the sublime, this fear is not experienced directly, but disinterestedly. "We can, however, consider an object fearful without being afraid of it, namely, if we judge it in such a way that we merely think of the case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it, and that any resistance would in that case be utterly futile" (CJ 119-20). Rather than in the direct feeling of fear, the crucial moment of the sublime occurs when the subject is able to gain distance from this fear in order to be able to defy material circumstances in spite of their power and thereby to affirm a spiritual reality that transcends the physical world. A reduction of the sublime to the moment of horror eliminates a transcendent ideal and with it any set of values according to which an individual could organize its experience and actions. The anti-metaphysical stance that only recognizes the moment of horror in the sublime

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can explain neither ethical behavior nor the construction of meaning that would allow consciousness to exist. Without the ability to assert some ideal against the immediacy of physical terror, consciousness disintegrates. For the transcendence of the physical world is simultaneously the act that gives meaning to the physical, fitting it within the parameters of a set of values that organize experience. Without values to integrate it into a meaningful framework, experience would be unassimilable.

In his alternative discussion of the sublime, Wellmer contends that Adorno's focus on the subject leads to the metaphysical idea of utopia. This idea must be eliminated in order to allow a world of pure immanence that Wellmer celebrates as an emancipation from metaphysical referents. In order to create this world, Wellmer must eliminate the overwhelming power of nature from his theory by considering the sublime to be an opposition between the abyss of meaninglessness and the ideal of reason. For him, "the opposition, the polarity, the irresolvable tension which gives rise to the feeling of the sublime would be one in the intelligible subject itself: namely the tension between the experience of an abyss of meaninglessness or non-sense, through which the subject of speech becomes aware of its own fragility, on the one hand, and on the other hand the subject's resistance to the superior force of negativity, through which the subject is able to sublate the experience of its own negligibility within the world of communicatively shared meaning and, in this manner, lifts itself out of its negligibility."[23] In order to lift "itself out of its negligibility" the individual posits a linguistic community of rational subjects as the creator of meaning. The world is not given to the individual but rather created out of human communication. The rational construction of meaning in language becomes the source of both values and of the world itself. As a consequence nature as it exists outside of human understanding is an "abyss," rather than an active force. Nature does not precede human attempts to understand it, and art's task is not to create a mimesis of nature but to push back the boundaries of meaninglessness by making the unintelligible into something pleasurable. "However, that other side of discursive reason, the abyss of meaning, is not only the unintelligible as the horrible, but also nature as a source of delight beyond all meaning."[24]

By identifying nature with the abyss and as a source of delight, Wellmer discounts the active power of nature and assumes that it is simply a void that can eventually be colonized by human understanding. Nature as

23. Wellmer, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an active force that might oppose human endeavor does not exist. As a result, art does not have any function independent of reason. It is simply the cutting edge of reason as it creates meaning out of the meaninglessness of nature: "by transforming the terror of what is unintelligible into aesthetic delight, [art] widens, at the same time, the space of communicatively shared meaning."[25] But as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* convincingly demonstrates, reason is not a value, but a method.[26] Consequently, it is possible to speak of instrumental reason as a means of achieving particular ends, but impossible to speak of substantive reason as an end in itself or as a foundation for meaning.

To affirm communicative rationality as the highest value that transcends the subject is only to say that the individual cannot exist alone, but depends on a larger community for its constitution. Though this point is important for understanding the basis of subjectivity, it is inadequate for explaining the construction of the values that define the totality of subjective experience and that give it meaning. Because the construction of values must occur within the consciousness of every individual if ethical behavior is to remain concrete and everyday, rather than abstract and exceptional, values cannot be separated into distinct "value spheres" governed by experts and communicative rationality, as Habermas and Wellmer propose, but must be established within a single unified, aesthetically-based totality that can be grasped immediately by an individual consciousness in the sublime moment.

In positing the rational construction of collective meaning in language as the ideal that opposes materiality in the experience of the sublime, Wellmer fails to recognize the true horror of nature that the individual faces and the consequent necessity of an aesthetic, rather than a rational foundation for values. Nature creates a supreme fear in the individual precisely because all of its human capacities, including reason and linguistic constructs, prove to be useless in the face of nature's power. Kant emphasizes that nature is not simply a void to be colonized by language but a "chaos" that displays "magnitude and might." Nature exceeds human capacities, not simply by lying beyond the reach of language, but by actively destroying human constructions. The possibility of values must therefore be built on the individual's acceptance of the material power of nature and an accompanying projection of an ideal that exceeds both human capacities and the indomitable power of nature. The sublime

25. *Ibid.*
26. Horkheimer and Adorno, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-88.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cannot exist in a world of pure immanence, but presupposes and enacts the movement toward the divine.

Adorno also fails to recognize this necessity of the divine for the construction of the sublime, considering nature reconcilable with human desires and positing a utopian reconciliation as the ideal that transcends material reality. Yet, his aesthetics are still superior to Wellmer's to the extent that he describes art as a mimesis of subjective experience that can only take place to the extent that processes in the work of art are a reenactment of processes that are essential to the experiences of the subject: "as if artworks, by molding themselves to the subject through their organization, recapitulated the way the subject originated, how it wrested itself free. Artworks bear expression not where they communicate the subject, but rather where they reverberate with the protohistory of subjectivity, of ensoulment, for which tremolo of any sort is a miserable surrogate." (AT 112-13) In focusing on the "protohistory of subjectivity," Adorno holds onto an experiential moment that can mediate between physical reality and spiritual values, allowing for the transformation of pure materiality into a meaningful world.

The mimetic structure that links the primal history of subjectivity to its recapitulation in the work of art is similar to Nietzsche's linking of the Dionysian to collective experience in the parable of conflict between man and nature. Both mimesis and the Dionysian use the individual as the measure of experience and of values. But, in contrast to Nietzsche, for whom the Dionysian aspect of the work of art is able to relate mimetically to a reality beyond the work of art by merging with a primordial unity that goes beyond the individual, expression for Adorno does not point beyond the individual, but is a mimesis of the process by which individual subjectivity develops. Rather than seeing nature as that which transcends both the subject and the work of art, Adorno invokes the history of the subject as the transcendent factor. "This is the affinity of the artwork to the subject and it endures because this protohistory survives in the subject and recommences in every moment of history" (AT 113). Expression for Adorno gains its force from the affinity between the processual character of the work of art and the process of individuation that he assumes must occur in the same way in every subject.

But instead of starting afresh at every historical moment, as Adorno asserts, the individual is determined by the collective within which it develops. If the history of the individual does not lie at the beginning of mankind, but rather is the fundamental story of every subject, constantly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

repeated in the development of every individual in history, the work of art's recapitulation of the emergence of the individual does not illuminate a primal history of subjectivity and the distortions that result from alienation, but records the culturally specific forces that determine a particular individual's emergence. In creating a mimesis of subjective processes rather than a representation of images, the work of art does not provide a history of how an abstract, universal subject is deformed by repression but outlines how a specific community forms its members through its particular modes of discipline. This discipline is not a form of irrational violence, but the precondition for the development of subjectivity.

By referring the immanent processes of the work of art to an abstract history of the subject, Adorno only manages to relate the development of one subjectivity (that of the artist) to that of another (that of the recipient). But if there is a similarity between the two that is not coincidental, then there must be another transcendent aspect that links both. For Nietzsche, this aspect is the primordial unity, i.e., an unknowable metaphysical force that permeates an otherwise immanent history in the same way that it presides over the development of the subject. The agent of this primordial unity is the collective as it establishes and carries on the traditions and rituals that enable subjectivity. But, because every community will have its own specific relation to the primordial unity and thus its own version of the divine, subjectivity will always be an outgrowth of a specific culture.

Adorno's inability to recognize this dependence of subjective experience on the traditions and conventions of a community leads him to assume a universal validity for his aesthetic judgments that they do not and cannot possess. This deficiency in his thinking has consequences that become evident in Shierry Nicholsen's analysis of the role of subjective aesthetic experience in Adorno's judgments on art. She demonstrate that his musical judgments, though subsequently buttressed by theoretical elaborations, originated in Adorno's first impressions of music.[27] The subjectivity out of which Adorno writes belongs to a specific community of individuals who have shared a similar upbringing, and the validity of his insights depends on this shared context, rather than on an objective and universal judgment. As a consequence, his aesthetic judgments are often based, not on logical arguments, but on association and innuendo understandable only to a group of initiates sharing Adorno's assumptions. But Adorno's commitment to a unified and universal history of subjectivity

27. Nicholsen *op. cit.*, pp. 24-31.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prevents him from comprehending how conventions and styles in art are essential to preserving art's particularity, which can never be particular as such, but always particular to a specific group. He interprets the return to convention in the late work of Beethoven, not as a realization of the community-bound and thus convention-based character of art, but as regression and cliché, as a sign of damage and "a kind of poison."[28]

Adorno replaces collective with subjective experience as the locus of cultural particularity. In his view, history rather than the primordial unity links one subjectivity to another, and both nature and the divine are considered either benign or irrelevant factors. Rather than conceiving of a particular collective with its rituals and traditions as the precondition for the development of subjective experience, Adorno derives the collective from the individual subject. The collective he constructs is, consequently, an abstract entity based on the assumption of a universal subject, rather than on a particular culture with non-interchangeable subjects. Though he recognizes the collective as the source of the legitimacy of works of art (AT 86), he denies the relation to the collective in his aesthetics by focusing on art as the product of the individual, rather than on myth as a collective event. He asserts the superiority of art to myth by arguing that, in the modern world, nature has been tamed and no longer presents a true opposition to human desires. This view of myth differentiates Adorno's progressivist outlook from Nietzsche's and even Kant's primitivist one. Adorno historicizes the relation between man and nature, while Nietzsche and Kant assume a basic similarity between the ancient and the modern worlds in their relations to nature.

Despite his general assumption of progress from the savage to the civilized, Kant's concept of the relation between man and nature in the experience of the sublime does not distinguish between primitive and civilized society. Both situations are defined by the antagonism between the power of nature and the weakness of man. In neither case is reconciliation with nature possible, but only the human adherence to an ideal. In replying to the objection that his analysis of the sublime is too sophisticated to underlie the judgments of all men, including the simple and the uneducated, he provides the following response: "I admit that this principle seems farfetched and the result of some subtle reasoning, and hence high-flown [*überschwenglich*] for an aesthetic judgment. And yet our observation of man proves the opposite, and proves that even the commonest

28. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

judging can be based on this principle, even though we are not always conscious of it. For what is it that is an object of the highest admiration even to the savage? It is a person who is not terrified, not afraid, and hence does not yield to danger but promptly sets to work with vigor and full deliberation. Even in a fully civilized society there remains this superior esteem for the warrior, except that we demand more of him: that he also demonstrate all the virtues of peace — gentleness, sympathy, and even appropriate care for his own person — precisely because they reveal to us that his mind cannot be subdued by danger." (CJ 121) Because nature's power always exceeds human capabilities, the sacrifice of physical existence for ideals is the characteristic of the warrior that Kant designates as ideal behavior for both the modern and the savage.

By contrast, Adorno assumes that the modern world dominates nature, while the primitive world is dominated by a fear of nature's power. "Times in which nature confronts man overpoweringly allow no room for natural beauty. . . . Wherever nature was not actually mastered, the image of its untamed condition terrified" (AT 65). Adorno connects nature in the modern world to reconciliation, while Nietzsche and Kant see nature as presenting limitations on human aspiration and emphasize a fundamental conflict between the two in both the modern and the primitive world. These differences from Kant's and Nietzsche's conception lead Adorno to assume a gradual progression of art away from myth, and thus from the spell of nature. "As its prose character intensifies, art extricates itself completely from myth and thus from the spell of nature, which nevertheless continues in the subjective domination of nature" (AT 66). The progression from nature's predominance to the subject's domination of nature creates the distinction between art and myth in Adorno's theory.

Despite the fact that his theory of form ultimately derives from Nietzsche's explanation of myth as a Dionysian formal structure, Adorno denies that art and myth might function according to similar structures. In claiming that formal consistency is only a property of secular art and not of myth, he assumes that inner form can only result from the subject's domination of the contents of the work of art. "Artworks extend the realm of human domination to the extreme, not literally, though, but rather by the strength of the establishment of a sphere existing for itself, which just through its posited immanence divides itself from real domination and thus negates the heteronomy of domination" (AT 77). Since for Adorno, the subjective domination of nature has only been accomplished in the modern world, only modern art can create inner form. By contrast, myth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only exists in a situation where nature is still uncontrolled. Adorno denies that myth could contain the formal consistency that would constitute its expressive character. "The aesthetic images, however, emancipate themselves from mythical images by subordinating themselves to their own unreality; that is what the law of form means" (AT 86). He reserves mimesis through form for art, and imputes to myth a mode of representation that directly depicts the absolute.

Locating the source of discord in the concept and not in the limits set by nature, Adorno distinguishes between art, which maintains the possibility of reconciliation by negatively depicting it as that which is beyond the concept, and myth, which rejects this possibility by emphasizing the inescapability of natural limits. Though Adorno correctly attributes to magic and myth an archaic violence that originates in the indomitable power of nature, he does not realize that the mimesis of this power is what creates inner form in both art and myth. He attempts to appropriate exclusively for art the Dionysian structures of myth by assuming that formal structure arises as the result of the subject's domination of nature and the contents of the work of art. However, in order for inner form to create expression, it must arise as the result, not of the subject's domination, but of its sacrifice in favor of a higher ideal in the confrontation with the power of nature. By failing to note the importance of formal structure for myth, Adorno also overlooks the essentially sacrificial structure of mimesis in art.

Myth does not represent the absolute as an Apollonian symbol, but as a Dionysian formal structure. The orientation to the divine depends on aesthetic mechanisms (which Adorno attributes solely to art), because the divine aspect of the cult object does not inhere within the object itself but, like the non-identical in the work of art, is established by a mimetic relation to the absolute as that which is absent in the image and must be extrapolated as a projection out of the form. Kant describes this negativity of myth when he relates the sublime to religious enthusiasm. His explanation of religious enthusiasm is exactly the same as Nietzsche's and Adorno's models for the appearance of the Dionysian and of expression in the work of art. The infinite can only be expressed negatively, and the negative structure of the sublime is the reason for the Old Testament ban on images. "We need not worry that the feeling of the sublime will lose [something] if it is exhibited in such an abstract way as this, which is wholly negative as regards the sensible. For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation [from the sensible] is an exhibition of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the infinite; and though an exhibition of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul" (CJ 135). This relates closely to Adorno's description of the work of art as a negative mimesis, not a positive representation. Yet, Kant is not referring to the work of art, but rather to religious rules. The absolute does not exist in the myth itself, but as a negative projection emanating from its form.

Though Kant's own Enlightenment prejudices prevented him from developing this account of the establishment of spiritual values, his analysis of the sublime provides the foundations for an aesthetics of myth. Here Kant links the sublime, not to nature, but to religious laws. "Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc. This commandment alone can explain the enthusiasm that the Jewish people in its civilized era felt for its religion when it compared itself with other peoples, or can explain the pride that Islam inspires. The same holds also for our presentation of the moral law, and for the predisposition within us for morality. It is indeed a mistake to worry that depriving this presentation of whatever could commend it to the senses will result in its carrying with it no more than a cold and lifeless approval without any moving force or emotion. It is exactly the other way round. For once the senses no longer see anything before them, while yet the unmistakable and indelible idea of morality remains, one would sooner need to temper the momentum of an unbounded imagination so as to keep it from rising to the level of enthusiasm, than to seek to support these ideas with images and childish devices for fear that they would otherwise be powerless" (CJ 135).

The enthusiasm that arises out of the experience of the sublime must be a feeling exceeding the bounds of reason, because the power of nature it confronts overwhelms the subject's capacities. Yet, it is only in this overwhelming of reason that the capacity for morality is produced. The basis of morality is not in reason, but in religious law, whose functioning is inseparable from the aesthetic experience of the sublime.[29] The indispensability of an aesthetic experience for the construction of morality leads to

29. Unfortunately, Kant was too committed to retaining reason as a basis for morality to recognize the necessity of the aesthetic moment of myth for establishing a moral sense in a community. Kant designates religious enthusiasm as a kind of "madness" (CJ 136), and, as Lyotard notes, this "enthusiasm is an Affekt, a strong affection, and as such it is blind and cannot, therefore, according to Kant, 'deserve the approval of reason.'" Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, tr. by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 166.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the conclusion that the formal structure of myth is similar to Adorno's concept of the work of art. Myth does not create a copy of the absolute, but acts mimetically in order to transform mundane into sacred experience.

Because the binding quality of a myth lives and dies according to its aesthetic effect, its construction of morality cannot be universal or abstract, but remains in an intimate relation to the experience of a specific community. The power of myth, as of art, depends on its ability to adjust to changes in the character of collective experience, and the truth of a mythic story is not a given, but depends upon the extent to which the structures of experience imbedded in its form still retain validity for a particular collective. Since moral truth is constructed aesthetically in the experience of the sublime, the cultural realm of traditions and rituals is the key site for the reception of values. Such a culture is not constructed universally on the basis of reason, however, but through the sublime, whose validity is justified aesthetically.

Because Adorno rejects the collective construction of values in myth in favor of the individualist construction in art, the collective postulated by his aesthetics is abstract; it is not founded on traditions and rituals, but on critique and reflection. The agent of aesthetic reception is not a religiously based collective, but a scientific research community that creates the supposedly indispensable philosophical critique of art.[30] Adorno's denial of the inescapability of sacrifice pushes his form of art in the direction of philosophy. In his aesthetics, critique must create the overarching context within which the work of art can speak to others. "The spirit of artworks is not a concept, yet through spirit artworks become commensurable to the concept. By reading the spirit of artworks out of their configurations and confronting the elements with each other and with the spirit that appears in them, critique passes over into the truth of the spirit, which is located beyond the aesthetic configuration. This is why critique is necessary to the works" (AT 88).

As Hohendahl describes, *Negative Dialectics*, *Aesthetic Theory*, and "Essay as Form" embody various attempts to "postulate a rapprochement between art's immanent logic and discursive thought."[31] Instead of allowing art to remain an independent realm of experience closed to conceptual structures, Adorno attempts to integrate the aesthetic dimension into the mechanisms of philosophy. He achieves this by creating a form of conceptual criticism in the essay form that goes beyond traditional

30. Zuidervaart, *op. cit.*, p. 146 and Hohendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 191, 211.
31. Hohendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

philosophical discourse and its discursive logic.[32] In describing this aestheticized mode of criticism, Hohendahl notes that, for Adorno, the essay form is built on "associations and equivocations" and that negative dialectics "remains discursive, although not bound by rigorous rules of rational argumentation."[33] Nicholsen describes this style of discourse in detail by showing how a passage from Adorno's essay, "Titles," is designed to give the impression of discursive argumentation while avoiding a clear and decisive argument in order that the reader might be provoked into further reflection.[34] But, while Nicholsen claims that this reflection creates a space of "freedom and lack of restriction," the autonomy of the reader is strictly delimited. The reader is not free to draw his or her own conclusions based on the configurations presented. Rather, as Nicholsen must also admit, "[t]his mass of reflection-provoking configurations of concrete elements is ultimately drawn back within the discursive form as a conceptual conclusion is drawn on the basis of it."[35] Instead of allowing the aesthetic realm to develop on its own and to create its own independent structures, Adorno's merging of art and philosophy in aesthetic theory ultimately draws aesthetic experience back to a predetermined conceptual conclusion. In his attempt to free theory from the constraints of the concept, he only manages to delegitimate aesthetic experience and to transform "art into an agent of critical theory's interests."[36] Theory will always be built on concepts, and, to the extent that Adorno theorizes with equivocations, rather than with clear theses, and associations rather than with arguments, he is either engaging in prevarication and "casuistry,"[37] or constructing an artwork that is calculated to lead the reader to a specific conceptual conclusion (a.k.a. tendentious art), as Nicholsen's analysis suggests.

Adorno attempts this dubious merging of philosophy and art, because, on the one hand, he seeks to translate the insights of art into the social realm, and on the other, does not allow himself to conceive of a type of art that establishes social structures based on aesthetic intuition alone — this type of art manifesting itself as the rituals and traditions of a community. Rather than seeing religious transcendence as the basis of the communal aspect of art, he connects art to community by means of

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-35.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 235 and 251.
34. Nicholsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-24.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
36. Rüdiger Bubner, "Concerning the Central Idea of Adorno's Philosophy," in Huhn and Zuidervaart, eds., *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
37. Bubner, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

philosophy. He argues that art, like beauty in nature, relates to its contents negatively. But instead of recognizing that this negative relation can only be properly constructed with an absolute that is undefinable, he seeks to create a conceptual determination of it, looking to philosophy to say that which art is not permitted to express. "Just as in music what is beautiful flashes up in nature only to disappear in the instant one tries to grasp it. Art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural beauty, but natural beauty as such. This denominates not only the aporia of natural beauty but the aporia of aesthetics as a whole. Its object is determined negatively, as indeterminable. It is for this reason that art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it" (AT 72).

The connection of art to philosophy expresses the dependence of art on reception. Yet the restriction of this reception to philosophy also separates society from the experiential dimension that is the point of the moment of reception in art. Adorno hides his prejudice in favor of concepts and philosophers by saying that philosophy can never really say what is to be communicated in art. This last pseudo-dialectical flourish, which both affirms and denies the importance of philosophy, is determined by Adorno's refusal to rely on the direct judgment of recipients. The rejection of this popular dimension is also the denial of cultural specificity. Though art needs reception, this reception is not philosophical and universal, but intuitive and cultural. The collective reception of myth does not attempt to establish the absolute conceptually, but allows it to remain a negative projection from the formal structure of myth. Because they avoid a conceptual determination, traditions and rituals maintain the only adequate mediation of truth with experience.

Adorno's merging of art with transcendence, while maintaining a subject-based totality, turns out to be impossible, because transcendence in art necessarily involves a transcendence of the individual in favor of a divine order. In positing utopia, rather than the divine as the place of a transcendent dimension that constitutes the subject, Adorno creates an elaborate tautological structure in which that which transcends the subject in art is the subject itself as delineated by its desires. Yet, his project of gaining an understanding of a specifically aesthetic mode of truth as opposed to a rational one remains valid. While rational arguments can serve as a method of achieving previously defined goals, they cannot function as a basis of moral judgments. Instead, judgment can only be based in structures of transcendence mediated by aesthetic truth. As

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opposed to reason's abstraction and universality, transcendence and art are situational and culturally specific. As such, they form the basis for the functioning of ethics, which must always be adapted to a particular situation. At the same time, the cultural specificity of judgments does not destroy their truth value and turn them into pure considerations of power. Though aesthetic truth is not based on rational argument, it nevertheless retains legitimacy based on the sacrifice of materiality in favor of transcendent ideals. Reason, because it is not based on sacrifice, but on the attainment of material goals, cannot serve as a substitute for aesthetic truth as a basis of morality. When the attempt is made to carry out this substitution, the result is an instrumentalization of sacrifice. Instead of being carried out in favor of a transcendent ideal, sacrifice within a rational order is made to benefit a temporal authority, which determines the final goals of this sacrifice. But, because there is no rational way to decide final goals and the traditions and rituals for this determination have been rejected, the goals become material and subject to the whims of those in power.

CAPITAL & CLASS
The Journal of the Conference of Socialist Economists
C&C Issue 68 Summer 1999
- Russia's Crises ..... Rick Simon
- Currency Instability and Crisis in Brazil ..... Lucio Morais et al
- Euromarch—The Struggle for a Social Europe ... Andy Mathers
- Marxism & Critical Realism ..... John Roberts
- Milestone in China's Privatization ..... W.K. Lau
- The Ecological Significance of Value ..... Paul Burkett
- Productive and Unproductive Labour ... S. Savran & E.A. Tonak
- People's Power in Mexico ..... Gustavo Esteva

£7.00
from CSE, 25 Horsell Road, London N5 1XL
Tel/Fax: 0171 607 9615 email: cseoffice@gn.apc.org
Credit cards accepted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From Brecht to Schleiermacher: Religion and Critical Theory

Russell A. Berman

It is difficult to start a discussion about religion. The topic irritates the modern public, especially the part that has been schooled in Critical Theory. Enlightenment hostility toward religion, which regularly goes far beyond skepticism, has profoundly shaped sensibilities and the habits of debate. Spoken or unspoken assumptions in the secular public sphere relegate religion to a fully private matter, and, therefore, not an appropriate topic for consideration, let alone a possible source for reflection on current theoretical or political matters. The elaboration of theory within the project of modernity is taken to be fully separate from religion, or perhaps even dedicated to the termination of religion: better politics as usual than any sacred intrusion.

However, the relegation of religious topics to irrelevant margins entails a break with the extensive concern with religion in critical social theory since the romantic era. Marx, Weber, and Bloch readily come to mind as figures whose thinking about society depended extensively on analyses of religion. Frequently, such critical engagement with religion and especially the recognition of religion as a crucial topic for the understanding of the social condition, have gone hand in hand with a critique of a reified secularism: a criticism of the rigid Enlightenment stance that religion be banished or destroyed. In other words, to talk about religion also means talking about the contemptuous dismissal of religion.

This tension appears in exemplary clarity in a short note by Bertolt Brecht on "the Communists and the Religious Struggles in Germany." Writing from Scandinavian exile during the 1930s, Brecht, who by this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time thought of himself as a rigorous Marxist, attempted to work through the political issues surrounding the Nazi persecution of the Christian churches in Germany. From today's vantage point, one can immediately see crucial issues which he missed: the problem of evaluating church collaboration with the regime, or the religious substance of Nazi anti-Semitism. These issues do not appear here, and the brief essay can hardly claim to present a global account of religion under Hitler. However, Brecht does succeed in highlighting the ambiguous position of emphatic secularists within the Communist movement *vis-à-vis* the Nazi conflict with the church. His concern is not only the conflicts within Germany; he is perhaps even more worried by the immobility and benign neglect that progressives were prepared to direct toward Nazi anti-Christianity. Thus, he begins: "Among us Communists, there was at first no unanimity on the question of how we should relate to the persecution of Christians by the Nazi regime. In a practical sense, there was no difficulty. We would open our doors to anyone fleeing from the Nazis, and anyone speaking out against the Nazis would find willing listeners among us. But, in terms of theory, some claimed that the destruction of Christianity is the progressive side of fascism, and that we should let the Nazis get on with it."[1] In other words, a pragmatic cooperation with any anti-fascists, religious or not, was undercut by a suspicion of religion on the part of the progressive camp, members of which were evidently not particularly dismayed by the fate of religion in Nazi Germany. Indeed, they were prepared to stand by and take a neutral position, privately applauding the "progressive" result of Nazi policy. No matter how much Communists might rail against National Socialism on other matters, their inherited Enlightenment suspicion of religion tempted them to side with the Nazis on this point. Reading the text, one can only be astonished at the clarity with which Brecht upsets standard political distinctions — Communists on the Left, Nazis on the Right — and sets them hurtling toward each other in secularizing solidarity.

For Brecht, this anti-religious stance was absolutely wrong, for various reasons. In terms of political alliances, he recognized how many German workers, precisely the population in which the Communists ought be interested, professed to Christianity, and it consequently made little sense for the Party to side with the Nazis, even implicitly: Communists should be siding with workers, Christian or not. More philosophically, his own most basic Marxism taught him that religion represented a projection of

1. Bertolt Brecht, "Die Kommunisten und die deutschen Religionskämpfe," *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 8, *Schriften 2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 796.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

earthly contradictions, and National Socialist policy was not about to eradicate them, i.e., whatever was taking place in Germany, it was not an uprooting of the preconditions of religion. Therefore, the temptation to applaud the Nazis for ending religion was misplaced (and the image of a "secularizing solidarity" of Right and Left illusory, since neither side was fundamentally secular). Finally, he presents a third point, particularly crucial here, because it shows the Marxist Brecht quite prepared to enter into a discussion about religious substance, rather than merely about the expediency of political alliances. Brecht complains that the "theoreticians of neutrality," i.e., those comrades proposing that the Communists not take a stance in the conflict between the Nazis and the Christians, are wrong, because they misunderstand the very real attack on Christianity as an attack on religion altogether. Yet, that diagnosis is tragically off the mark: "In the Third Reich, there is no struggle against religion, but a struggle between two religions. Neo-paganism is not atheism, but rather just as much a religion as was ancient paganism. And in comparison with Christianity, neo-paganism is a regressive religion. National Socialism is fighting Christianity and replaces Christianity with neo-paganism, because it needs a religion that will better support its own regressive goals. It needs a warrior religion, a religion of the heathen sacrifice of the individual, and a purely German religion, one that is directed against other peoples. If we fought the Christian religion, because it was an opiate that, as we said, lulled the oppressed into passivity, then we have to fight this new religion all the more, because it is a much bigger drug dealer, a compulsory state drug dealer that magnifies the passivity of the oppressed toward their oppressors and, moreover, turns them into blind and useful tools for the expansion of oppression of other peoples."[2]

The passage is not only about a characterization of shifting ideological constructions or pragmatic politics. Brecht recognizes a religious substance in National Socialism that he is prepared to judge inadequate in comparison with Christianity, i.e., he is taking a stance within a field of religious dispute. The description of the neo-pagan loss of Christian universalism and the disappearance of individuality (subsumed under the mandate for self-sacrifice) is the beginning of a critique of National Socialism through its religion. Moreover, Brecht goes on to predict that the Nazi attacks on the churches will continue to elicit some resistance among German Christians, and that precisely this resistance will contribute to a

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 796-797

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

transformation of Christianity itself: not toward its secularization or disappearance, as was evidently wished by some progressivists, but toward internal corrections precisely of its religious and ethical character, i.e., it may become a better religion in the future due to the master/slave struggle with the state: "Christianity is entering a very fruitful struggle with its own heathen residues and is being forced to revise its own blind submissiveness to the state, which had always led it to support wars and the unconditional support of outdated forms of ownership."[3] Christianity, as Brecht suggests, had supported the *status quo* in the past, and had done so because it had been caught up in pre-Christian "heathen residues." He evidently associates paganism, old or new, with a mode of full submission to the state; consequently, the growing enmity between church and state gives the church, paradoxically, an opportunity to separate from its statism and therefore from its paganism. Regarding the churches' alleged complicity with the *status quo*, Brecht is surely correct for most of the 19th and 20th centuries; a longer view of church history would find plenty of instances of opposition to the state. His prediction was eventually confirmed that the experience of National Socialism and the role of some church resistance (perhaps less than he might have wished) contributed to a rethinking of elements of Christianity and its relation to politics after 1945.

Brecht may have had a sharp eye for some religious matters, in part, because the very foundations of his own materialism and his own literary imagination, borrowed extensively from religious rhetoric. It is not accidental that he broke onto the literary landscape with a volume of poetry, *Die Hauspostille*, translated as "Breviaries," that is modeled explicitly on liturgical form, and his intention was surely not at all simply parodic. On the contrary, a recognition of some key religious tropes was the source of much of his enduring vision: the transitory nature of human life, the corruption of the flesh, an unfulfilled desire for ethical improvement — terms which he later would translate into a Marxist idiom. Yet, literary history aside, Brecht's comments on religion here indicate precisely the potential fruitfulness of reflection on religious substance from the standpoint of critical social theory, just as his identification of the willingness of some Communists to applaud the Nazi attacks on Christianity sounds uncannily similar to contemporary progressives' dismissal of issues of religion. Actually, although the essay highlights the conflict between the Nazi state and the Christians, Brecht outlines three, not two, distinct positions: the Nazi

3. *Ibid.*, p. 797.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neo-pagans who maintain a self-destructive sacrificiality and an obsequiousness toward the state, while combining them with an externally directed aggression; Christianity, historically subservient to the state, but now called upon to overcome itself and aspire to a potential activism; and the Communist "neutralists" themselves, with their preference not to become involved, not to act, and merely to watch the destruction before them. In other words, while his ostensible topic is restricted to the drama of persecution within Germany, he slyly introduces a critique of Communism and the profound inadequacy of its secularist and opportunistic predispositions.

Of these three ethico-religious positions, the Communist is by no means the superior one; on the contrary, for Brecht, with his constant focus throughout his career on the urgency of practice and resistance, it appears that the prospect of an activist Christianity is preferable to Communist know-nothingism. Better a Christian with a capacity for resistance, than a Communist unable to act. In fact, from the vantage point of an absolute valorization of activism, Communist immobility might even be taken to be less attractive than Nazi aggressivity — except that Brecht, of course, also insists on the fundamental subservience built into neo-paganism. Still, subservience, the reluctance to call structures of power into question, may mark a subterranean link between regressive paganism and progressive Communism, in opposition to which Brecht suggests an emancipatory Christianity of resistance and universalism. Within Brecht's subtle comments on comparative religion, it seems as if the progressive contempt for religion can slide behind religious progress and reproduce atavistic forms, even when it prides itself on standing outside religion.

Today's irritation with religion, the reluctance to accept a discussion of it in the context of the critical-theoretical public, has a history that long predates Brecht's comrades' indifference to Nazi policy. At a fundamental level, this is the direct heir to the Enlightenment call to *Ecraser l'infâme*, and it makes no difference, evidently, who is the tool for carrying out that demolition. Protests against this dialectic of enlightenment, the transformation of the program for tolerance into an intolerance for religion, begin in the romantic era. In 1799, Schleiermacher complained about precisely this contempt for religion in the educated elite. Commencing his *On Religion: Addresses to its Educated Despisers,* he wrote that: "It is perhaps an unexpected enterprise, which will surely surprise you, that someone might dare to address you — you who are elevated above the common man and permeated by the wisdom of the ages — in order to treat a topic that you have so thoroughly disregarded. I also confess that I have seen nothing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

promising either the easier conclusion, that you might applaud my efforts, let alone the more desirable result, that I might convince you to share my enthusiasm. For faith has never been every man's affair, and only the few have recognized religion, although millions have dallied with its superficialities, which in turn they regard with bemusement. But today, the life of educated people is far from anything close to it. Yes, I know that you revere God in some holy contemplation as little as you visit the abandoned temples; that in your luxurious dwellings no sacred relics are found other than the clever sayings of our wisemen and the grand poems of our writers; and that humanity and sociability, art and science, for which you do so much and from which you so greatly benefit, have so fully occupied your spirit, that you have nothing left for the eternal and holy being that lies beyond your world and for which you have no feeling. I know how well you have succeeded in so richly embellishing earthly life that you no longer need eternity and how, now that you have created your own cosmos, you are beyond thinking about your own creator. You are in agreement, I know, that nothing new or useful can be said about this matter that has been so thoroughly discussed by wisemen and seers, and should I not add, by mockers and priests. No one can miss that you are least predisposed to listen to the latter, the priests, whom you long ago expelled and declared unworthy of your trust, since they prefer to dwell in the weathered ruins of the sacred, although they cannot live there without spoiling them even further. I know all this; *nevertheless*, evidently driven by an inner and irresistible necessity, I am inspired to speak, and I cannot retract my invitation that you listen to me."[4]

Schleiermacher's diatribe describes a situation still quite familiar: the educated public despises religion, wants nothing to do with it, and is unwilling to enter into a discussion about it. Much like Brecht's Communists, Schleiermacher's *Bildungsbürgertum* wishes that religion would quietly disappear. Of course, he is aware of how absurd his plea must appear, that he be taken seriously in his attempt to argue the case for religion. Brecht's text hides that case in a subtle dialectic; Schleiermacher, in contrast, argues head on, with a take-no-prisoners vigor. Still, he too has to make concessions to secularist taste in the wake of the Enlightenment, making it clear that his advocacy for religion has nothing to do with an atavistic neo-ritualism. Throughout the volume, he emphasizes that he has little sympathy for the romantics' fashionable return to Catholicism

4. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ueber die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Leipzig: Kroner, 1924), p. 1.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(hence, the brief if stinging dismissal of "priests" in the above passage), nor does he propose a reassertion of an orthodox Protestantism. The "religion," that he intends to draw to the attention of the educated world is not conventional religion, not habits of prayer, ritual or tenets of faith. Rather, Schleiermacher posits crucial features of religious consciousness or experience, including both an intense personal, emotional and cosmic vision — a dialectic of individuality and universality — which is crucial to human sensibility and which shrivels in the context of dogmatic secularism. The urgency of Schleiermacher's position derives from his claim that the suppression of religion, which the Enlightenment persecutes, because it regards religion as just so much superstition, in fact impoverishes human life. Culture without religion is not emancipated; it is only insipid, and we should avoid confusing flatness with democracy. Hence, the sardonic description of the luxurious dwellings of his educated public, full of the consumer goods of the day, because a genuine religious sensibility has been displaced by what Marx, within the romantic tradition, would designate as commodity fetishism. As with Brecht, so with Schleiermacher, the rejection of religion does not lead outside of religion, but only to an impoverished form of religion, an idolatry of consumption, and broader cultural evisceration.

This is the level at which Critical Theory can pose the question of religion and politics: the proximity of secularization and reification. The marginalization of religious experience, the contempt for ritual, and the dismissiveness toward tradition — these features of the progressive unfolding of rational culture — participate in a process of social and cultural transformation that does not end up in a world of enlightened and mature individuals, but rather in precisely the "fully enlightened world" of conformism and vacuity described by Horkheimer and Adorno. Consideration of religion in this cultural-critical context is potentially much more valuable than the alternative and unfortunately standard approaches to the question of the political deployment of religion. On this point, there is a tendentiousness both on the Right and the Left to the extent that competing political camps attempt to instrumentalize religion for their own ends. In particular, neoconservatives tend to cast religion as a component of cultural compensation: religious teachings might become a vehicle for inculcating order and virtue in order to preserve traditional social discipline, despite extensive social transformations. Religion, in other words, is treated as itself valueless and not in any way "true." It is, at best, a mnemonic device for a society viewed as increasingly forgetful of an appropriate social order.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet, precisely such an instrumentalization of religion is itself forgetful of the specifically numinous or transcendental components. To put prayer into school in order to bolster classroom discipline is an abuse of prayer.

The corollary problematic on the Left involves manipulations of religion for social ends: where religious teaching is reduced to garden-variety humanist ethics or well-meaning exhortations to good behavior. Whether the particular political issues have validity is nearly of secondary importance; the process as a whole instrumentalizes religion, and thereby contributes to its secularization. It is here that a critical-theoretical grappling with religion should begin, an insistence on the autonomy of the religious dimension (it is not just politics in disguise). Such a "Schleiermacherian" redefinition of religion — the emphatic intrusion of the dialectic of individual emotion and cosmic scope — provides an alternative to the fragmented reification of modernity and therefore becomes the precondition for a potential cultural criticism.

One of the difficulties with making claims about religion is a reluctance to consider it within any specific civilizational-historical frame. Debate is stymied by a false sense of obligation to treat religion in general, i.e., all possible religion, rather than any specific religious material (as Brecht, for example, was still able to do). In fact, this reluctance to address specific religions itself reflects the privatization of religion, always regarded as a personal, even intimate matter, compounded by a politically-correct sensitivity to shy away from addressing matters that might touch anyone's beliefs too closely. This obsessive effort to remain distant and polite implies avoiding any topic that might offend, especially religion. The phenomenon is aggravated by the globalization of cultural perspectives, insofar as potential claims about religion are expected to have validity for all religions. This ethnographic levelling shifts discussion away from any concern with Western specificity, and only the most anemically general statements can be generated.

This perpetually generalizing approach necessarily misses the key civilizational-historical issue at stake: the transition from emphatically local paganisms to axial world religions, which took place between two and three millennia ago, and, which, especially in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, fundamentally transformed human ways of life and humanity's contemplations of its own limits.[5] To address this transition as the basis for a discussion of religion is crucial. But it is also nearly

5. Cf. John Milbank, "The Politics of Time: Community, Gift, and Liturgy," in *Telos* 113 (Fall 1998), p. 54.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impossible in the context of the contemporary limits on discussion described above, i.e., the requirement that religion in general, and not these specific religions, be discussed. Yet, it is within these axial religions that the life of humanity is largely played out. Based on universalist revelations, i.e., experiences of the divine reported as pertaining not merely to a tribe, but to the full cosmos, these religions made enormous contributions to the process of overcoming constrictive local limitations. The world of tradition and local idol worship suddenly became obsolete, and in its place a grandly wider horizon opened up, within which more supple versions of local tradition could develop. The particular dynamism of the West derives explicitly from this conflict between local lives and universal aspirations. If universalism called into question tribal narrowness, it also challenged the immanently dictatorial powers of organized state power: no matter how mighty the pharaoh, the king, or the emperor, a sense of a divine creator could always suggest the possibility of an outside to a given system of power. In Millbank's words: ". . . all axial religions invented modes of community intended to qualify the sway of the state and its abstractions."[6] A specific locality could appeal to the cosmic horizon in order to relativize the expansive state, while at the same time that horizon of openness could challenge any merely habitual or routinized features of local life. Out of this revolution of the axial religions emerged the dialectic between the local and the universal, which has provided the foundation of Western culture for millennia and which explains its particular capacity for creativity.

This dialectic has been marked by several features, and first among them has been a dramatic capacity for anti-traditionalism. Western religions stand out as proceeding from radical breaks with the past: Abraham, Jesus, Mohammed. None is about a continuation of mere life as it has always been lived; all are about striking out in qualitatively new directions. The given is therefore always suspect and called into question, and the culture as a whole demonstrates at least a desire and perhaps a capacity to generate the new. Whether this innovative potential can survive secularization and the suppression of religion is another matter. Yet, secondly, precisely this anti-traditionalism, with which religion commences, is constantly confronted with an orientation toward tradition within religion, especially the building of religious tradition and the specific relation of religion to family life. To a large extent, religion draws its strength from sensibilities of reverence toward the dead, and this is why it

6. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is particularly anchored in families. The exercise of religion involves sensibilities of cross-generational family loyalty. The passing of generations is the object lesson in the limits on individuality, and it is in the family that new members join the community through birth and leave it in death. Religion marks these transitions, and defending them, as in the case of Antigone, is often a highly political matter. Religion is the defense of family piety against the instrumentalizing stratagems of the state.

A third feature involves the centrality of beginnings: these are not merely creation "myths," i.e., arbitrary narratives, but rather demonstrations of the extraordinary significance given to creativity within the world-views of axial religions. Notions of human dignity that characterize Western culture at its ideal best — not at its practical worst — derive from the religious imagination of the human freedom to create in imitation of the divine creator. In other words, the importance of the creation myth is surely not in its natural-scientific value (as simplistic "creationists" would have it), but in the establishment of a norm of creativity as a value for social life: the alternative would be the pagan obsequiousness to which Brecht referred. The tension between localism and universalism has its echo along a temporal axis between past and future, tradition and creativity, memory and aspiration. Their notional synthesis points to a project of redemption, where that which has been lost might be reclaimed through time. There is, however, no guarantee of redemption, and axial religions, despite all the magnificence of the universal vision, ultimately convey a sense of fragility and susceptibility to decline. Precisely the disappearance of the pagan gods, which the world religions initiate, betrays the perpetual potential of secularization. Fallenness, the expulsion from Eden, is a constant fact of human life; its critical-theoretical designation is reification, and the crux of axial religions, and of Critical Theory, involves the project of calling reification into question.

The precondition for proceeding with this project for a critical engagement with religion as a component of Critical Theory involves facing up to the current historical and political context and the quite real grounds for apprehension regarding religion. While part of that apprehension is surely a reflection of a basic post-Enlightenment predisposition, it would be foolish to deny that some concerns reflect legitimate political anxieties. What are they? Examples abound, including the prospect of the Christian fundamentalist Right intervening in social policy, e.g., by prescribing prayer in school. (What would that appropriate prayer be? Can we imagine the discussion in the educational bureaucracy regarding a determination of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shared prayer for all?) A second set of examples might be taken from Israel and the role of the religious parties (although there is reason for caution, since precisely religious parties, such as Shas, turn out to represent more progressive positions on matters of peace than does the relatively secular Likud: religion is not necessarily the problem.). Other examples could be drawn from Islamic states. In general, the critical public in the United States recoils from the prospect of defining political programs in religious terms, let alone basing legal codes on holy texts, and this apprehension is translated into a reluctance regarding religion in general.

These examples can be approached in at least three distinct ways. First, the phenomena of "sacralized politics" could be addressed within the standard liberal terms of a separation of church and state. This would correspond most obviously to the post-Enlightenment tradition. Yet it is also a sort of wishful thinking. Religious politics will not disappear simply because first-amendment advocates wish it so. A second, more germane approach would imagine diminishing the role of the state altogether. The more state intervention in society is reduced, the less relevant do religious incursions into politics become. In the end, the liberal concern about the possible consequences of sacralized politic is indicative more of a healthy fear of the expansive state than of a negative judgment on religion itself.

There is, however, a third sort of answer to propose to skeptics who question the wisdom of turning toward questions of religion within the contemporary critical landscape. Aside from the specific concerns regarding the separation of church and state or the scope of state interventionism (both of which, in different ways, are highly polemical terrains), the underlying concerns regarding religion involve something else altogether: the character of certain religious practices, which appear to be sectarian, fundamentalist, or obsessive. Advocates of religious politics are subject to the criticism not only that they are intervening, inappropriately, in politics, but that, as religious figures, the nature of their religion is somehow bizarre, i.e., that they represent distorted extremes within their particular belief system (and there are Jewish, Christian, and Islamic examples). In turn, this implies a distinction between appropriate modes of religiosity and pathological variants. Can we in fact distinguish between an excessive and dogmatic religiosity, on the one hand, and an appropriate version, on the other? Who makes that distinction? Can one sketch a range of religious forms along a scale from, say, one extreme with ultra-observant forms and another extreme of a dogmatic secularism? Following Brecht

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Schleiermacher, one might expect that secularism to eschew specific religious identification, while, in fact, reproducing the worst features of religion in the form of secular failings. One would also want to be able to describe a supple middle-range that avoids both an impoverished secularism and an authoritarian orthodoxy.

Is there a way to describe the pathological religious forms of sects that is not, at the same time, applicable to religion in general? To relegate a decision like this to the state would certainly threaten religious freedom. Yet if the state cannot draw that sort of distinction, it hardly follows that a Critical Theory of religion cannot judge and choose. Indeed, this is precisely where a Critical Theory of religion might begin. Within the context of an extensively conformist American culture, for which hostility to religion is in fact just another vehicle of conformism, Critical Theory is called upon to reflect on the distinction between successful and reified forms of religious life. As much as the religious dimension can be imagined as a source of enrichment and quality in culture, there is no reason to assume that this one particular sphere of social activity — religious observance — would escape the sorts of problems that beset the rest of society. If fragmentation, alienation, and disorientation characterize the work place, family life, and educational institutions, we should not be surprised to find similar phenomena in religious life as well, with related reaction formations. Yet, our Enlightenment instincts regarding the taboo of talking about religion may prevent us from talking about the distortions of religious life, since a critique of any religious phenomenon, no matter how problematic, may sound like intolerance. Hence, the hesitation to discuss sects as pathologies.

Yet, there are moments when religion does fall behind axial standards, where the dialectic of local and universal is broken, and where redemption turns into reification. Despite Voltaire, religion is not mere superstition; and despite the first amendment, mere superstition is not religion. Nevertheless, the cultural resistance to insisting on distinctions such as these is enormous. Blurring the lines would be more acceptable. This capacity to confuse obsessive behavior with religion, and thereby to miss out on the particular power of religion, concerned Schleiermacher at the conclusion of his polemic. Speaking dismissively of romantics turning to an aestheticized (but largely non-spiritual) Catholicism, he commented: "And what they genuinely seek and desire is idolatry, which has, alas, infiltrated the Protestant Church as well, if with less splendid forms and therefore less seductively. Since it is not blunt and colossal enough for them here in Germany, they look for it on the other side of the Alps. For

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an idol is nothing more than when something made and touched by hands, something that can be broken by hands, is foolishly misrepresented, despite all its temporality and fragility, as a piece of eternity — although not due to its own immanent force and beauty, but rather to something temporal, as something frequently devoid of ideas and fully confused, it could also be eternal: so that it might be fondled and measured, arbitrarily and magically. This sort of superstition in the Church and the priesthood, sacrament, absolution, and redemption is what they are looking for. They will not find it, however, for it is all confused, and it will all only lead to further confusion, as they plummet out of the shared sphere of education and indulge in an empty worthless activity; even the sense of art, which God gave them, will turn into vanity."[7]

The dialectic of enlightenment runs from the sophistication of the educated elite, devoid of spirituality, through a desire for aestheticized religion, to a vacuous degradation of both art and any prospect of religious sensibility. The religious fad of romanticism misses the genuine core of religion: the authenticity of individual faith and the recognition of a universal god. Throughout the passage, Schleiermacher plays on notions of inversion, of getting things backwards, and this is the same topsy-turvy world of Hegel and Marx. Schleiermacher's account of distorted faith is a corollary to the emerging theorization of alienation, and therefore quite compatible with the intellectual roots of Critical Theory. Schleiermacher's complaint, and it can be ours too, is that the educated opponents of religion may themselves be succumbing to the evisceration of culture. Yet, in a redefined vocabulary, religion could come to match the projects of Critical Theory, or, rather, religion becomes the Critical Theory of the fully enlightened world of dogmatic secularization. Or, to return one more time to Brecht's account: better resistance through faith than conformism through politics.

7. Schleiermacher, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ethnic Purges and Neighborly Pacts: Reflections on a Swiss Statue

Rick Johnstone

Perhaps too much time is spent asking the wrong questions, like why does ethnic cleansing happen in places like Bosnia and Rwanda? What should also be asked, instead, is "why does it not happen in other places where it could, such as Switzerland and Canada?" Like Sherlock Holmes, we could pay more attention to the dog that does not bark, the ethnics that do not cleanse.

There is a strange statue in a Swiss park that prompts some brief reflections here about the enigma of Swiss success. It is in a prominent spot, right in the middle of Geneva, by the Pont du Mont Blanc, where Lake Geneva turns into the River Rhone. Two women of regal bearing, arm in arm, look off into the distance. Underneath, in big letters, there is an odd word that no one has ever heard of. Tourists are mystified, as they head back to the bus and to some proper monuments in Paris. This is no *Arc de Triomphe*.

But, perhaps it is just as significant, if the code is deciphered. Switzerland has certainly been in the dog-house lately, over things like Nazi gold, and this is a useful corrective to all those happy notions about the land of Heidi. Yet, this land would likely rank high on any list of the most successful countries. Ironically, however, very little is said of the formula. This is in marked contrast to neighboring France, where grand displays speak in the grandiose rhetoric of civilization and progress, of national glory and human rights. It is as if the winner of the Olympic Marathon was hanging about in the background, with no gold medal, surprised by curious journalists. Who, me?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When asked for a definition of man, a character in one of Bashevis Singer's stories says: "a pig that knows it's a pig." What of a winner that does not act as a winner? True, the Swiss know they have got their act together. But the other Olympians still hog the limelight. Recall, for example, the big fanfare a few years ago on the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, and the pompous debates about who should get the gold medal for what. Mitterrand and Thatcher got into a slanging match over who invented democracy — the French or the English. The Swiss found this all rather bizarre, having already done that themselves a full 500 years before the French Revolution. A few years later, however, the 700th anniversary of Swiss democracy went largely unnoticed by the rest of the world, and was only modestly marked by the Swiss themselves.[1]

700 years is quite a long time, and is indeed a telling clue, since democracy was not supposed to be happening back then. What the Swiss invented was a kind of pre-Enlightenment democracy, that was not based on abstract concepts about human rights. Taking advantage of the natural fortress of the Alps, which is far more formidable than any feudal castle, Swiss peasants managed to do something most peasants could never do. They overthrew the overlords and fashioned a new kind of autonomy.

The geopolitics of Swiss democracy is interesting in itself. The political significance of mountains (and of inaccessibility more generally) in overcoming the classic problems of peasants in imperial systems has been underestimated. For thousands of years, conquering cavalry would just sweep over the plains like Panzer tanks. But from Swiss Alps to Newfoundland outports, hard to find means hard to get. Wittfogel's geopolitics could thus be broadened into a wider continuum, extending from Oriental despotism right over to its polar opposite — alpine democracy.

Geopolitics sheds light not just on the origin but also on the nature of this new democracy, which took the form of federalism. For what is distinctive about federalism is its sense of place. Of course, all states, including the unitary state, are geopolitical, but this is especially true of the federal state, as a de-centralized political system with significant local sovereignty. This goes against the grain of modernism — the unitary state is more in keeping with the placeless logic of Enlightenment universalism. It also goes against the grain of Marxism. This is paradoxical, because, as a post-Hegelian materialism, Marxism was anchored in nature. But, as a cosmopolitan rationalism, it would dismiss the ties of

1. See Willi Goetschel: "Switzerland, for Example," in *Telos* 88 (Summer 1991), pp. 155-166.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

place. A nature-based political economy would be subsumed within a de-natured political philosophy. Anti-nature would then be legitimized by anti-fascism. But communist anti-fascism would misrepresent the politics of place. Having a say in the Canton of Uri does not make one a Nazi.

Anti-nature would be compounded by anti-property. Marxism was totally out of sympathy with the peasant attachment to land, and with the whole idea of property-as-sovereignty. Misguided or not, communist anti-capitalism was at least understandable, and even capitalists got the point. But the communist war against the peasants has always been a different matter. It was not just shocking to the peasants, but also exposed the deep antipathy of Marxism to any kind of local, land-based sovereignty. This would become all too clear in Soviet anti-peasant campaigns, which killed millions of people, and were already foretold from day one by the Leninist purge of the anarchists in 1920-21. Bloody indeed would be that "little misunderstanding" between peasants and communists about whether "land reform" actually meant land for peasants or serfs for statism. But for Marxism, it was no misunderstanding, and the Leninist state was no accident. As an anti-nature, anti-property philosophy, Marxism would reject any land-based sovereignty, and the Leninist state would indeed eliminate any pluralism of power. In the communist Punch and Judy show, the tale told by puppets is all too clear: hammer courts sickle, but then sickle is hammered. Lenin clobbers Makhno.[2]

Sickle would also be hammered by dollar, but in a different way. The problem here is not property itself, but market forces (such as concentration of ownership and globalization of markets), which threaten small producers. Capitalism is anti-peasant, not in its assumptions, but in its con-sequences. Big fish eat little fish, and dominate the pond. Market mania takes hold, and efficiencies of scale supposedly prove that small-is-back-ward. Resistance to free trade faces an uphill battle, and is dismissed as foolish protectionism. Alternative economics and small-is-beautiful ideas (E. G. Schumacher, Suzuki, Grameen) remain subversively utopian.[3] If Russian peasants who resisted communist collectivization in the

2. Nestor Makhno was the main leader of the Ukrainian anarchists, who helped the Red Army win the civil war after the Russian revolution, but were then put down by the Bolsheviks (who opposed anarchist autonomy). He managed to escape, and ended up as a waiter in Paris, where he died in poverty.

3. British economist E. F. Schumacher wrote the book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered.* Canadian geneticist David Suzuki is a leading ecological critic. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is famous for successfully breaking all the rules of orthodox banking (e.g., with loans to illiterate peasants who have no collateral).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1930s were seen as reactionary obstacles to progress, so also were Swiss peasants in the 1990s, who rejected capitalist globalization, free trade pacts, and ten-lane highways through the Alps.

So, from Marxism to Maastricht, what Swiss peasants began 700 years ago in the Canton of Uri has radical implications to this day. Peasant geopolitics generated a sovereignty-based, rather than rights-based kind of democracy, that runs counter to cosmopolitan centralism, whether of the liberal or the communist kind. Federalism would then assume more modern forms, and rights would become part of the mix. In the West (e.g. Canada), this would mean a distinctively liberal federalism, which combines individual and collective rights, and which thus offers a kind of human rights compromise to a world beset by the opposing forces of globalism and tribalism.[4] At any rate, the Swiss peasants of the 13th century could probably handle the politics of the 21st. In its origins and workings, Swiss democracy emphasizes the role of place in politics, and the limits of any universal scheme. This peasant democracy was about real autonomy rather than abstract rights, guaranteed not by central government, but by neighborly pacts. People took charge of their own affairs, and tried to protect them through a collective security system of mutual aid between neighboring groups. That is, after all, how it all began, when the three cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden set up their "mutual defence league" in 1291, to resist the Holy Roman Emperor's feudal demands. And, by and large, this system has worked. Stuck in the middle of a continent with a 2000-year history of strife, the Swiss region (the alpine cantons and neighboring towns) became a place of stability and prosperity, and was already famous for that long ago.[5] It is not for nothing that, back in the 16th century, Calvin decided to make Geneva the headquarters of the Protestant reformation, or that later on, people like Voltaire (in the 18th), Wagner (in the 19th) and Lenin (in the 20th) all headed for Geneva when things get too hot back home, or that, later on, Geneva became the headquarters of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and so many UN and other international agencies today.

A sovereignty-based, rather than rights-based view speaks in specific

4. On the idea of liberal federalism as a "compromise human rights system," see my previous *Telos* articles on federalism and human rights (*Telos* 93, *Telos* 100, *Telos* 109).

5. Paradoxically, however, it was a son of Geneva (Jean Jacques Rousseau) who would go on to become a chief architect of Enlightenment universalism (for example in his *Treatise on Social Inequality*, which he wrote in Geneva). Although the *genevois* were somewhat uncomfortable with his way of thinking, they have not forgotten him. Just on the other side of the Pont du Mont Blanc from the statue is another statue — a pensive Rousseau, on his very own island, the Ile Rousseau.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather than general terms. It talks of Uri, rather than utopia. This does not make it purely parochial. After all, the principle of self-determination has universal appeal. But, it means the mundane language of place. Instead of triumphal arches, there are strange statues in the park. By the lake, the two figures look into the distance. And, on the plaque below, what is the strange word no one has ever heard of? *Combourgeoisie*. Thanks to Marx and sociology, the term *bourgeoisie* is familiar, though less so its derivation. The fact that *bourgeois* means *burgher*, or town-person, and that this then becomes code for capitalist, symbolizes the historic link between merchants, towns and freedom in the West, and, thus, between capitalism and democracy. But *combourgeosie*? Even the sociologists have not heard of that, let alone the tourists getting back on the bus for Paris. Yet, here it is, in broad daylight, in the middle of Geneva, in one of the most prominent spots of Switzerland.

So what does it mean? It literally means a pact between communities, an alliance of towns (in this case, between Geneva and its neighbors).[6] Therein lies its symbolic meaning, which has to do with a basic principle of Swiss democracy: the neighborly pact. This may not seem like much. But what, after all, is a neighborly pact? If something is defined in terms of what it is not, then at least a neighborly pact is not a neighborly purge. In effect, this is a monument against ethnic cleansing. It is not a grand monument about glory or rights, like the *Arc de Triomphe* or the Statue of Liberty. On the contrary, it is modest and obscure. But when the code is deciphered, perhaps there is a message for today, about good neighborliness.

What is it about the *Arc de Triomphe* anyway? Is not the very idea of a triumphal arch rather gross? What is implied by what is glorified? People jest that all the Swiss invented was the cuckoo clock. But the French combination of revolutionary terror and imperial conquest was not all that funny. People jest that no one knows who is the President of Switzerland. Yet, the fame of Robespierre and Napoleon is a fame that some could do without. Who, then, is the President of Switzerland? Well, nobody knows. That is supposed to be the joke. But is it all that funny? Or do we sometimes take for granted the significance of what we do not know? If no one

6. The statue commemorates an alliance of 1526 between Geneva, Bern and Fribourg. Geneva did not become a Swiss canton until 1815, but for hundreds of years before that it had enjoyed a Swiss type of autonomy, which various feudal powers (notably the Dukes of Savoy) failed to suppress, and which was partly secured through neighborhood pacts like this one in 1526, when reinforcements from Bern and Fribourg helped to repel the Savoyards, which in turn paved the way for Calvin's hybrid "reformation-republic" in Geneva in 1536.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knows who the President of Switzerland is, that is because it does not matter, and if it does not matter, that is not because Switzerland is not a success, but because it is, and because its success comes not from above, but from below. Unlike the French, with their monarcho-presidency, the Swiss do not really care who the president is, and do not even want to have one at all. What is distinctive here is not just no Big Leader, but no desire for one in the first place. So if the Martians do come and say "take us to your leader," they had better not land in the Alps.

Sociologically, in the modern world, this is quite extraordinary, and like many unusual achievements, it seems to be crazy and is belittled by jokes. A people must have glory, leaders, power. The idea of a "leaderless people" without "national glory" is right off the map. Yet, the modern map is full of the headstones of glory. In France, even the smallest towns have those familiar memorials, with the names of all those who died in the meaningless mud of a pointless war. Where were Swiss peasants during the Battle of the Somme? They were in the Alps making cheese. What would have happened later if the Nazis had invaded is another matter. But missing the First World War is already something. "No, I'm sorry, I can't make it to the trenches, I have to milk my cow, so I guess I'll have to miss all that glory."[7] Nor was this anything new — they had already missed the Thirty Years War of 1618-48, and most other wars in between.

One of the great unspoken truths of the 1920s was the terrible sense of waste. The war was bad enough, but to think the carnage was all for nothing was sickening indeed. This could not be said too loudly back then, out of respect for the victims of the so-called Great War. The big turning point was the 1960s, when, for the first time in history, the glory formula failed, and a war became unfightable because of a refusal to fight. American students may not have been milking cows, but they were actually doing something far more subversive. Funny though it may have sounded, the slogan "make love not war" was actually one of the most radical ideas in history. While it would not have stopped Hitler once he got power, it might well have prevented the First World War, and thus indirectly the Second. If all those young men had stayed home, their

7. A striking feature of 1914 was the gleeful rush to war, and even the fear of being too late and missing the action. For example, survivors of Shackleton's Trans-Antarctic Expedition (which set off in August 1914 and was lost in the ice for nearly two years) were relieved to discover in 1916, as they emerged from their unbelievable ordeal, that the war was still going on and that they might still make it to the front. See Caroline Alexander, *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ghosts would not have had to return, to hover around with their awkward questions. "Why did I leave my loved ones? Why did I not just stay home and read to my children and plant my garden and make love to my wife? How could I have given all that up for a trench of death? What on earth was I thinking? Was I mad? Or was society mad?"[8]

In the 1920s (let alone 1914), the idea that society was mad was a bit ahead of its time. But that is the world-historical significance of the 1960s: the renunciation of death by glory, the principled refusal of war, the idea that society can be mad. Why this all came about is another matter. But what it meant was the end of a warrior culture that had always forced men to become fighters and die. Never before could you say no, but now you could. A key link in the old chain had been broken: the do-what-you-are-told kind of deference to authority. The First World War had deep roots in the social psychology of the Victorian family. Of course, ideas like nationalism would play a key role in motivating people to act as they did. But, to be effective, this had to be internalized, with the sanctions of shame, guilt, honor and fear, through the authoritarian socialization of a patriarchal and hierarchical culture. If one learned early on that one could not say no to father and school, how could one ever say no to King and Country?[9]

In the 1960s, that snapped. This is well symbolized by a brief but brilliant scene in what is otherwise not necessarily the best of the Vietnam films — *Born on the 4th of July*. The All-American hero who "did his duty" has now come home in a wheelchair. Home is the suburban bungalow of the American Dream. The family is around the table at lunch, and his younger brother and sister start to question the war. An earthquake begins. A chasm opens up in Happy Days, which would spread across a whole continent, in similar homes and towns around the land.

Of course. if saying no was now possible, that would not mean the end of war. But things have changed. There is a big difference between NATO and 1914. It is no longer glorious to go off and get killed. Vietnam

---

8. The 1960s decisively re-balanced the old tension between *eros* and *thanatos* in favor of *eros*, and away from the *thanatos* world of the Somme and of Auschwitz, in which the life force is present, but doomed (as captured, e.g., by the sometimes shocking juxtaposition of sex and death in D. M.Thomas's searing Holocaust novel, *The White Hotel*).

9. 9. The implication that fascism should be explained and prevented in psychological and not just political terms (e.g., sexual liberation and not just class struggle) was a key part of Wilhelm Reich's attempt to fuse Marx and Freud in the 1930s — a bold move, which managed to get him expelled from both camps. Then, after the war, in the US, things only got worse for Reich, whose next bold move, to invent an orgasm machine, led to his arrest by the FBI and a jail term as a "crackpot."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

led to the politics of bodybags, and the post-modern fantasy of costless war. If the exchange of prisoners in the Middle East produced a bizarre new math (one Israeli soldier equals twenty Arab "terrorists"), the bodybag factor means a whole new system of calculus (one American soldier is not worth losing for anything). The new reality is not the end of cannons, but of the endless supply of cannon fodder. In the First World War, the bodybags never stopped. But in the 1990s, just a few from Somalia would mean a US veto over UN intervention in Rwanda, and a NATO strategy in Kosovo that ruled out ground troops from day one.[10] NATO reliance on bombing in Kosovo was symptomatic of the post-modern politics of war. The New World Order means "I can shoot you, but you cannot shoot me." Roman legions and British regiments did not operate on that assumption, and whatever similarities there may be, *pax americana* differs from *pax romana* and *pax britannica* in significant ways. Young Americans do not want to go off and get killed, and the 1960s made that okay. In the Somme, deserters were shot, but in Vietnam it was officers who had to watch their backs, and, after Vietnam, it was no longer heretical to say "hell no, I won't go" — the White House already assumes that.

Swiss neutrality was not as radical as 1960s flower-power and Gandhi pacifism. After all, Swiss democracy began with armed resistance against feudal domination, and its neutrality (which began as early as 1515 and was entrenched by the Congress of Vienna in 1815) has always included the principle of self-defence and thus some aspects of a warrior culture. Invaders would learn this the hard way. Already back in 1474, the Habsburgs had to give up their quest for control, complaining about those "Swiss mountaineers" (whose legendary prowess would later mean career opportunities for Swiss mercenaries in places like the Vatican). But this was not the chauvinistic militarism of an aggressive nationalism. Like the cuckoo clock, the Swiss Army knife is a symbol of self-reliance, rather than of imperial war. There is indeed a Swiss army (which is not led by Buddhist monks, and which, in Tibet, would have given the Red Army a rough time). But Swiss absence from the Battle of the Somme was no accident. There is a striking scene in the Australian film *Gallipoli*, in which the two lads from the outback are eagerly making their way to the

10. It is now clear that the massive genocide in Rwanda in 1994 might have been prevented, and that the main reason why the UN did not send General Dallaire the reinforcements he requested in his "genocide fax" (based on very accurate warnings by an informant about the impending genocide) was not just the dithering of UN leaders in New York, but also a White House veto based on the recent murder of American peace-keepers in Somalia.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

war in Europe. Crossing a desert in the middle of Australia, they meet an old man, who asks them where they are going. "To the war," they say. "What war?" he asks. What war indeed — lucky were those who could even ask that question. But the lads press on. Industrial warfare and cannon-fodder mentality then make a mockery of their traditional warrior skills, and, in the end, it seems they might just as well have stayed home. Swiss peasants did.[11]

So the glory story is not all that glorious, and there are other stories besides. As it turns out, I was in Switzerland on the 700th anniversary of Swiss democracy, and found myself in a cafe reading the 700-year old Swiss equivalent of the American Declaration of Independence — another one of those strange Swiss things no one has ever heard of. Of course, up in the Alps in the Middle Ages, the peasants of Uri were not using Enlightenment concepts, and the Oath of the Reutli is quite matter-of-fact. It is a short pact about mutual aid and self-defence — the people of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, "in order to protect themselves and their own . . . have sworn in good faith to assist one another reciprocally, with aid, with appropriate counsel and favors, with personnel and with goods . . . with all strength and effort against any and every foe that might bring violence, difficulty or insult against them or any one of them."[12]

Is there a common thread between these two quite different documents? The clue, perhaps, is independence, and the way in which both implicitly define democracy in terms of autonomy. This principle may or may not become couched in the language of rights. But whether it is or not, in the language of power it means that people are in charge of their place, that the people of a place have a say in that place. Indeed, indirectly, the Oath goes on to affirm the sovereignty of the people, through rules for law and order and reciprocal agreements about crime and punishment, with judges who must be "our inhabitant and one of our people." The issue is autonomy, rather than rights, even if later defined with rights. The same applies to the prominent Swiss role in the Protestant Reformation (as celebrated by other statues in Geneva, such as the Reformation Wall). Even if speaking in religious terms, Zwingli in Zurich and Calvin in Geneva were

---

11. Exactly the same kind of film could have been called *Beaumont Hamel*, about the lads from the Newfoundland outports who joined the Newfoundland Regiment and finally made it to the front, only to be mowed down by machine guns in a few minutes on July 1, 1916 at Beaumont Hamel, as the Battle of the Somme began.

12. Oath of the Ruetli mountain, between the people of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, August 1291 (trans. from Latin by Richard Hacken, Brigham Young University).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effectively declaring independence from not just one, but two dominant powers — the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. Once again, we have to decipher the code (the Reformation Wall is not full of grand slogans). But that all this was not done in terms of rights does not make it any less radical. On the contrary. What is so surprising, later on, about a declaration of rights in an age of rights? Is that not to be expected? These Swiss revolutions of the 13th and 16th centuries were not expected. They were ahead of their time — by about 500 years.

Rightless democracy turns into rights-based democracy, but, in the end, there is still the question of space, of who is in charge of what place. And as history would show, rights were no guarantee of autonomy (or even of life itself). Unitary states in the West and Leninist states in the East would both talk a fine line, but would both move in on the neighborhood. Even in federal systems, the modern state would stand accused (both by neo-conservatives like David Frum, and critical theorists like Paul Piccone) of being the bossy nanny of a bureaucratic class.[13] But, at least federalism understands the critical role of place, and offers a working compromise between the politics of rights and the politics of place.

Liberals have understandable suspicions about "the old group thing," but the bottom line is that, if you do not find a place for groups, they will find a place for you. Cosmopolitan disdain for the ties of place does not prevent Auschwitz. The peaceful coexistence of different groups requires group security, which is, in turn, fostered by forms of sovereignty which empower people and place. That is what federalism does. The placeless logic of modern universalism is tempered by the old logic of place, and the often toxic politics of identity becomes a less dangerous politics of security. But who wants to do without the Statue of Liberty? Without some notion of universal rights, we risk not learning the lesson of Auschwitz, even while learning the lesson of Uri. It is not a matter of choosing between the Oath of the Reutli and the American Constitution, between group sovereignty and human rights, but rather of understanding and combining the wisdom of both. That is what liberal federalism does, as a compromise human rights system. The Swiss peasants of 1291 could protect themselves. But not everyone can. If democracy is enriched by local sovereignty, dignity is enhanced by human rights.

So how do we get safe neighborhoods? The answer is not clear. But

13. See, e.g., David Frum, *Dead Right* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and *What's Right: the New Conservatism And what it Means For Canada* (Toronto: Random House, 1996), and Paul Piccone's review "Blunder on the Right," in *Liberty*, Vol. 8, No. 5, pp 53ff.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at least the question makes sense. Kosovo was just the latest in a series of nasty neighborhood brawls. And the partisan debates, about who is to blame and which side is right and what should be done, raise wider questions about how to prevent it all in the first place. For that, one could do worse than to seek lessons from other places, like Switzerland and Canada.[14]

The Swiss case is obviously complex, and not without its darker side.[15] But 700 years of democracy, of no ethnic cleansing, of no Big Leaders and national glory, of no war-mongering and empire building, of peace, stability and prosperity, has to mean something. It does not justify uncritical acceptance of the Heidi story. But, in the end, the question of why people do not wipe each other out is just as important as the question of why they do. We know why they do in Gaza and Bosnia, but we need to know more about why they do not in Uri and Quebec. And it may well have something to do with this statue in the park. How do people look ahead together rather than slit each other's throats?

---

14. For a discussion of the Canadian case, see my "Canadian Federalism: The Decline and Fall of Quebec Separatism," in *Telos* 109 (Fall 1996), pp. 141-158.

15. The dark side includes a long denial of political rights to women. But rather than being unique to Switzerland, this reflects a pervasive sexism that delayed such rights in other Western countries as well. And if this is not just a Swiss issue, neither is it the only issue. Things like sexism and racism diminish, but do not invalidate the historic achievements of Western democracy. Moreover, these achievements now do include rights for women that are still routinely denied in many non-Western societies that reject universal rights in the name of traditional culture and thus use cultural relativism to defend sexism. These achievements, it should be noted (especially by some critical theorists who may use the Swiss case to reject universal rights) are a matter of liberal rights. Fortunately, for Swiss women, Switzerland is not Iran or Saudi Arabia, but is part of the West. In the end, rights for Swiss women stem not from Swiss federalism, but from Western liberalism. They are a vindication not of federal populism, but of liberal federalism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new german critique

an interdisciplinary journal of german studies
editors: David Bathrick, Biddy Martin, Miriam Hansen, Andreas Huyssen, Anson G. Rabinbach and Jack Zipes

New German Critique is the first American journal to develop a comprehensive discussion of German politics, social theory, art, and literature on an international level.

Number 77 **Spring-Summer 1999**

Special Issue on:

German-Jewish Religious Thought

David Sorkin: *The Mendelssohn Myth and Its Method*
Allan Arkush: *The Questionable Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn*
Michael Brenner: *Polemics of German-Jewish Identity*
Susannah Heschel: *Abraham Geiger's* Wissenschaft des Judentums *as a Challenge to Christian Hegemony in the Academy*
Leora Batnitzky: *Rosenzweig's Aesthetic Theory and Jewish* Unheimlichkeit
Peter Eli Gordon: *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Translation, Ontology, and the Anxiety of Affiliation*
Stéphane Moses: *Gershom Scholem's Reading of Kafka: Literary Criticism and Kabbalah*
Jonathan Skolnik: *Kaddish for Spinoza: Memory and Modernity in Celan and Heine*

Personal one-year subscriptions cost $35 in the US and $40.25 elsewhere. One-year institutional subscriptions cost $80.00 in the US and $92.00 elsewhere. Make checks payable in US funds, drawn on US Banks. Back issues are $14.00 each. Institutions pay $30.00. All back issues are still available. Send all correspondence to:

Telos Press, 431 E. 12th Street, New York, NY 10009
tel: 212-228-6479 fax: 212-228-6379 e-mail: telospress@aol.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Legitimating Post-Fordism: A Critique of Anthony Giddens' Later Works

Anthony King

Introduction

Although Anthony Giddens describes his approach as "social" rather than "critical" theory, and although there is little obvious Frankfurt School influence in his writing, he believes "social theory is inevitably critical theory."[1] While he might aim at such a critical position, it is far from obvious that he succeeds. On the contrary, his later writings have become an apology for the *status quo*.[2] Failing to consider his prejudices, perhaps because he thinks critique is inevitable, Giddens has increasingly vindicated predominant relations of domination. He celebrates the rise of post-traditional individuals, who have the freedom of choice to create and

1. Anthony Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 15.

2. Patrick Baert argues that Giddens' career comprises four periods: the first (the 1960s) includes his articles on suicide; the second (from the beginning to the middle of the 1970s) includes his writings on Marx, Durkheim and Weber; the third (from the middle of the 1970s until 1984 — the publication of the *The Constitution of Society*) includes his writings on structuration theory; and the fourth includes everything published in the late 1980s and 1990s. See *Social Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 92-4. This division is not without merit. But Giddens' structuration theory constitutes a distinct body of texts, published between the mid-1970s and 1984. Moreover, the first mention of "structuration" appears in *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies*, which Baert considers part of his early period. Dividing Giddens into an early and a later period, situating structuration theory at the end of his earlier period, is more straightforward, and reflects the similar concerns and style of Giddens' writing from the 1960s to 1984. The key division on which this paper is based, and on which it is in agreement with both Baert and Jeffrey Alexander's "Critical Reflections on Reflexive Modernization," in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1996), is that there is a demonstrable divide in Giddens' writing after 1984.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

re-create themselves, while reproducing the global system that has liberated them. His celebration of the individual echoes dominant free market principles, which privilege choice and consumption, and have been central to the post-Fordist transformations in the West.

Structuration Theory

Giddens' first serious works in the early 1970s examined the ways in which Marx, Weber and Durkheim can contribute to an the analysis of late 20th century society. Out of these works emerged a more focused theoretical interest in structure and agency and, from the mid-1970s onwards, his structuration theory sought to overcome the dualism of structure and agency through a synthesis of functionalism, structuralism and interpretivist traditions. Allegedly, functionalists like Parsons and structuralists like Levi-Strauss had overemphasized objective factors in social life, at the cost of the individual agent, while the interactionist and interpretive tradition, represented by Goffman and Garfinkel, did exactly the opposite, overestimating the importance of individual agents.

Structuration theory was meant to explain how social relations stretch across time and space to reproduce the social system through meaningful individual action.[3] To that end, Giddens postulated the notion of "the duality of structure," whereby structure,[4] consisting of "virtual" rules and resources orienting individual action, is both the medium and the outcome of individual actions.[5] These virtual rules are problematic, but the role they play in structuration theory is important. When individuals act, they draw on these virtual rules to carry out certain social practices, thereby reproducing the rules which were the medium of their practice in the first place. Giddens illustrates this duality by the favored example of language use: "when I utter a grammatical English sentence in casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole."[6] For Giddens, individuals do not merely reproduce structure, the rules which

3. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 35.
4. The notion of structure originally arises in Giddens' work out of the concept of practical consciousness, which he distinguishes from either discursive consciousness or the unconscious. See Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 2. Whereas discursive consciousness refers to those areas of knowledge of which one is aware, and the unconscious refers to subconscious motivations, practical consciousness refers to the state of consciousness in which one ordinarily lives. This is captured best by Schutz' notion of the "taken-for-granted."
5. *Ibid.*, p. 9
6. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inform action, but also the system of enduring social institutions, because the rules ensure the appropriate routines for the system's reproduction. By drawing on the rules appropriate to the institutions in which individuals find themselves, they reproduce those institutions. There is a duality, not only of structure (rules and resources), but also of the social system (institutions), where the system's properties become the medium and the outcome of individual action. "One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (duality of structure)."[7] Although, at first, it is only the rules that are reproduced in social practice, Giddens assumes that these rules are unproblematically connected to the wider system and, therefore, that the system is, more or less, automatically reproduced by individual practice.

For the most part, Giddens' structuration theory is concerned with the system's reproduction through individual practice, even though many of his critics wrongly argue that structuration theory ignores the social system.[8] The centrality of the individual, however, does appear at certain moments. Having argued that the individual must be bound to the system through structure, Giddens insists that "it is a necessary feature of action that, at any point in time, the agent 'could have acted otherwise'."[9] This contradicts the rest of structuration theory, which explicitly limits the randomness of individual action through "structure" and appears in Giddens' writing as an unfounded ideological assertion of Western liberal values.[10] Thus, Mestrovic has argued that Giddens' appeal to the persistence of the free, autonomous individual in the face of the "juggernaut of modernity" is an act of optimistic bad faith, where Giddens, an optimistic modernist, refuses to accept the darker implications of modernity (which, in fact, he always recognizes).[11] For Mestrovic, Giddens cannot accept the implications of his own theory or the reality of modern society, which substantially curtail individual freedom. The subordinate individualist element in structurationist

7. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society, op. cit.*, p. 19.

8. See Alex Callinicos "Anthony Giddens: a Contemporary Critique" in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1985), pp. 133-166 and Margaret Archer "Morphogenesis versus Structuration: on Combining Structure and Action" in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 456-483.

9. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory, op. cit.*, p. 56.

10. See Nigel Pleasants "Free to Act Otherwise? A Wittgensteinian Deconstruction of the Concept of Agency in Contemporary Social and Political Theory," in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1998), pp. 1-28.

11. Stepjan Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens: the Last Modernist* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 4, 23, 78 and 155.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

theory becomes dominant in his later work, where the claim that individuals "could have acted otherwise" becomes the focus. As the liberated individual becomes central, Giddens himself becomes an apologist for post-Fordism.

Post-Fordism

By the mid-1970s, the Keynesian and Fordist systems of regulation and production were becoming obsolete. As the long post-war boom ended, the consumer market became saturated, multinationals became increasingly dominant, and Western states found themselves unable to manage the economy and to mediate between labor and capital. As Hayek argued, Keynesian efforts to sustain full employment stimulated inflation, which jeopardized the very jobs the state was meant to defend. The massive inflation caused by the 1972-73 oil crises rendered Fordism and Keynesianism unviable and, from the mid- to late-1970s, there was a move toward new post-Fordist regimes, at the forefront of which were Reaganite America and Thatcherite Britain.[12] Although it is dangerous to differentiate too sharply between this post-Fordist transformation and the Fordist era, there have been certain broad changes, which can be characterized as comprising four main elements. In terms of production, the post-Fordist era is marked by flexible specialization in increasingly dominant multinational corporations, although the extent of this shift has been debated.[13] Politically, there has been a shift away from Keynesian management to neo-liberal *laissez-faire*, where state involvement in the economy has been reduced by deregulation and privatization.[14] Socially, the key transformation has been the development of a one-third, two-thirds society, where notions of Keynesian universality have been rejected, since it has been recognized that an all but permanently unemployed underclass has become unavoidable.[15] Culturally, there has been a shift

12. For general accounts of the Fordist and post-Fordist regimes and the transformation to post-Fordism, see Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *New Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

13. See Michel Piore and Charles Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

14. See David Marquand, *The Unprincipled Society* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1988); Andrew Gamble, *The Free Market and the Strong State* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983); Bob Jessop *et al.*, *Thatcherism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

15. See Linda Mcdowell, Philip Sarre and Chris Hamnett, eds., *Divided Nation* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1989); Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (London: Vintage, 1996); Ash Amin and Anders Malmberg, "Competing Structural and Institutional Influence on the Geography of Production in Europe." in Amin, *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, *op.cit.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away from a restrictive Protestant ethic toward hedonism and consumption.[16] Individual choice has increasingly been emphasized in debates informing these four major transformations, as opposed to the corporatist solidarity dominant during the postwar period.

For Lash and Urry, "this accelerating individualization process is a process in which agency is set free from structure and it is a structural change itself in modernization that, so to speak, forces agency to take on powers that heretofore lay in the social structures themselves. . . Structural change in the economy forces the individual to be freed from the structural rigidity of the Fordist labor process."[17] They highlight the fragmentation of the Fordist economy that has increased the numbers of individuals employed in the service industry, facilitating the consumption of symbolic goods concerned with the creation of identity, which, in light of class and gender decomposition, has become more negotiable. The development of elaborate post-Fordist markets has expanded the consumer choices of affluent individuals. Increasingly, economic and social policy, as well as personal social relations, have been justified by, and understood in terms of the sanctity of individual autonomy. Thus, although most modern post-Fordist countries are not the most individualistic, Western states increasingly deploy the rhetoric of the individual to justify post-Fordist transformations.[18]

The Later Giddens

Since 1987, Giddens' concerns have shifted from the dense theoretical discussions of earlier periods, to a focus on the defining characteristics

---

16. See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), pp. 5 and 14; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

17. Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*. (London: Sage, 1994), p. 5.

18. *Ibid.*, p.108. Lash and Urry overstate the point when they argue that "Anglo-American consumption is much more modern, individualized and reflexive than its Japanese and German counterparts," when, in fact, the service orientation of the British and American economies should be interpreted not as a vindication of modernity, but rather as a testament to these nations' uncompetitive manufacturing sectors. Nevertheless, their argument about the increasing individualization which occurs as a result of the development of these very sophisticated methods of "sign-value" marketing does reflect the direction of neoliberal, post-Fordist reforms. Nowhere is emphasis on the individual clearer than in the Thatcherite reforms of Britain in the 1980s, each of which was explicitly justified by appealing to the greater efficiency and equity of individual initiative and reward. Thatcher announced this new allegiance to the autonomous individual when she declared that "there is no such thing as society — only individuals and families." See *The Times* (January 19, 1985).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of late modernity.[19] For Giddens, modernity involves the disembedding of relations from local settings and their stretching across time and space. In light of new methods of communication, face-to-face relations of pre-modern societies have been replaced by long-distance relations.[20] This disembedding of relations has become a crucial feature of globalized, late or high modern society, as he calls it, and has produced new forms of risk and trust.[21] Giddens has rejected many of the terms often applied to post-1970s society, such as post-industrialism, because, he argues, industry is still central to economic production, and postmodernism: the term refers to "aspects of aesthetic reflection" and exaggerates the rift with modern culture.[22]

Giddens defines post-traditional society primarily by its opposition to a traditional one. Accordingly, a traditional society is characterized by a stifling allegiance to the past, which legitimates action and prevents change. In traditional society, guardians, who are seen to have sole access to truth, protect and sustain traditions.[23] Since modernity and late modernity are post-traditional societies, traditional societies are all those societies that have existed across the globe before the great European transformation of the 18th and 19th centuries.[24] Giddens does try to qualify this claim, writing that "in even the most traditional of societies not all things are traditional,"[25] but, although he concedes that no society is completely traditional,[26] he nevertheless insists that late modernity is the most radical social form and the least dependent on tradition. Yet, the notion of post-traditionalism is problematic. It is not even clear that late modernity is less traditional than other cultures for, as Giddens notes, traditions created by the Enlightenment and European Christian culture are still very influential.[27] Moreover, it is not clear that any society is traditional in the way he caricatures non-Western and pre-modern cultures. These cultures

19. Alexander has satirically called this "Giddens lite." See Alexander, "Critical Reflections," *op.cit.*, p.135. See also Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

20. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 4.

21. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity, op.cit.*, p. 7.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6 and 150. Giddens has never employed, but also never dismissed, the term post-Fordism.

23. Anthony Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, eds., *Reflexive Modernization* (Cambridge: Polity,1994), pp.75 and 84.

24. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

25. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity, op.cit.*, p. 80.

26. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity, op. cit.*, p. 48; *The Consequences of Modernity, op.cit*, 37.

27. Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens, op. cit.*, p. 2.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are also dynamic and critical, wherein tradition rarely, if ever, has the deadening effect Giddens assumes. At any rate, those practices taken to be immemorial are often only recent inventions conveniently mythologized by dominant groups.[28] Thus, any definition of society as traditional becomes problematic. Despite his qualifications of the idea of tradition, Giddens refuses to see that, in the end, they undermine reified appeals to tradition and post-tradition, which are essential to his later work. Societies cannot be meaningfully classified in this fashion, since the terms "tradition" and "post-tradition" merely formalize assertive, cursory understandings of the societies in question, without revealing anything of their organization and culture. The terms "traditional" and "post-traditional" conceal and legitimate cursory, even personal evaluations of past and present social forms.

There are serious difficulties with the term "post-traditionalism." Its real significance, however, lies in the kind of individual it implies. This new individual is the core of Giddens' later writings. "In many pre-modern contexts, individuals (and humanity as a whole) were more powerless than they are in modern settings. People typically lived in smaller groups and communities; but smallness is not the same as power. In many small-group settings individuals were relatively powerless to alter or escape from their surrounding social circumstances. The hold of tradition was more or less unchallenged."[29] In post-traditional society, the individual is no longer committed to one tradition, nor restricted to ascribed social relations. Consequently, post-traditionalism facilitates the development of individual reflexivity. Since it is no longer obvious what individuals should do or be, they must consider their options and make choices about what they should do; they are truly "free to do otherwise." Individuals must reconstitute their self-identity reflexively. "The more tradition loses hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of a dialectical interplay between local and global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options."[30]

No longer constrained by tradition, but now exposed to a vast array provided by global capitalism, individuals have to decide what kind of persons they will be. "The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which individuals are responsible. We are not what we are, but what we make

28. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
29. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, *op.cit.*, p. 192.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of ourselves."[31] While much of Giddens' work suggests that the emergence of this personal reflexivity is emancipatory, he does point out the negative side; i.e., that the emphasis on personal choice raises the problem of existential doubt and ontological insecurity.[32] If personhood is no longer grounded in the authority of tradition, which "sequesters" all sorts of potentially dangerous practices, and gives life an automatic meaning,[33] then individuals must personally ground their lives. They have to quell existential doubt and to establish ontological security through the creation of personal routines. Late modernity facilitates the development of reflexivity by expanding the choices individuals can make, but this expansion of choice and loss of traditional authority also produces Durkheimian anomie.

Crucially, the arena in which individuals establish their identities is no longer work but lifestyle: "A lifestyle involves a cluster of habits and orientations, and hence a certain unity which is important to a continuing sense of ontological security and that connects options in a more or less ordered pattern."[34] In late modernity, consumption becomes the key area of cultural meaning and individual expression. Although Giddens is oblique about the origins of this new primacy of consumption, it can be inferred from his writing. "In a post-traditional social universe, reflexively organized, permeated by abstract system in which the reordering of time and space realigns the local with the global, the self undergoes massive changes. Modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choice."[35] Whereas, in traditional societies, patterns of consumption were more or less obvious and were created and sustained locally, the development of new forms of production and marketing have dissolved those local practices and have introduced new ones that originate elsewhere in the world, and the individual can now freely choose.

In light of this centrality of individual autonomy, Giddens rejects Keynesianism, which he sees faltering, because it "presumes a citizenry with more stable lifestyle habits than are characteristic of the globalized universe of high reflexivity."[36] In this new world, the Keynesian direction of the economy, which sought to manipulate demand in line with collective

31. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-9 and 48-55.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
36. *Ibid.*, p.42.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

interests and communal values, is untenable. In proposing a radical politics for this new post-Fordist era of expanded consumer choice, Giddens rejects Keynesian collectivism in favor of individual reflexivity and freedom of choice. This individualistic emphasis on freedom of choice becomes clearest when he discusses the emergence of a new form of sexuality as a central element in the self's new reflexive practices. According to Giddens, the sexuality of post-traditional society is distinguishable from former societies by the fact that sexual practices have become divorced from biological reproduction. Consequently, the uses of sexuality have been transformed.[37]

With this severance of sexuality from reproductive needs and the development of "plastic sexuality," Giddens envisages the development of "pure relations" between individuals. These relations of friendship or "confluent love"[38] are the most striking and potentially the most liberating aspect of post-Fordist society, since individuals are no longer bound to each other by social and moral obligations, but only by their personal needs and the pleasure which their open sexual relations mutually produces. "Giving certain conditions, the pure relationship can provide a facilitating social environment for the reflexive project of the self."[39] Once individuals have established certain rules of conduct, they can deploy their sexuality plastically in mutually pleasurable ways. Giddens is extremely optimistic about the power of the pure relation, and maintains that "the transformation of intimacy, together with plastic sexuality, provides conditions which could bring about a reconciliation of the sexes."[40] Although Giddens emphasizes the plasticity of sexuality, given the new individual reflexivity and the vast choices available, the individual's entire selfhood becomes plastic. Giddens is extremely optimistic about post-Fordist society. For him, new technological and institutional developments have broken the shackles of tradition and have liberated individuals into a world of choice in which they can freely decide on the ways in which they can lead their lives and interact with others.

---

37. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 34: "Reproduction was once part of nature and heterosexual activity was inevitably its focal point. Once sexuality has become an 'integral' component of social relations, as a result of changes already discussed, heterosexuality is no longer a standard by which everything else is judged. We have not yet reached a stage in which heterosexuality is accepted as only one taste among others, but such is the implication of the socialization of reproduction."
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Against the Later Giddens

(A) Political Ameliorism. For the most part, Giddens does not discuss the new conflicts in this emergent social order, but focuses only on individualist issues of personal identity and relations. However, in his latest publications, *Beyond Left and Right* and *The Third Way*, he attempts to address wider political issues and to lay out a program of post-Fordist political reform. He does not always ignore the serious problems which confront contemporary Western politics. He recognizes the current crisis in the public sector and insists on its reform against neo-liberal demands for its abolition. Even when he highlights a serious conflict in post-Fordist society, however, he glosses over the nature and scale of these problems, begging the questions they pose. Thus, he accepts the rightist critiques of the welfare state, that it is undemocratic and restrictive of personal liberties, but insists that "a reformed welfare state . . . has to meet the criteria of social justice, but it has also to recognize and incorporate lifestyle choice, be integrated with ecological strategies and respond to new risk scenarios."[41] The sentiments behind these reforms are admirable, but in substance his proposals are mere platitudes far too general to have any practical application. Although he sometimes accepts the scale of the problem, his solutions are mere slogans that never seriously address the crisis. The welfare state and the public sector are subject to pressures which are the result of large historical transformations. Reform cannot be achieved by merely being more aware of "lifestyle choices" or trying to be more "entrepreneurial." The line of transformation will be determined by the wider socio-historical context, and Giddens' role should be to highlight the kinds of trajectories which that social and historical context imposes on the welfare state. In the absence of such grounded analysis, Giddens consistently plays down the seriousness of the political difficulties inherent in the post-Fordist settlement. In so doing, he presents an overly optimistic description of this society.

This legitimating optimism is particularly obvious when Giddens announces that the collapse of communism demonstrates that Western capitalism is the only feasible economic regime today: "No one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism — the arguments that remain concern how far, and in what ways, capitalism should be governed and

41. Giddens, *The Third Way* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 45. Later, on p. 122, he expands on this: "Benefit systems should be reformed where they induce moral hazard, and a more active risk-taking attitude encouraged, wherever possible through incentives, but where necessary by legal obligations."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regulated."[42] His claim that capitalism is the only way is unobjectionable since, broadly speaking, it simply refers to the fact that, after the collapse of the USSR, appeals to large-scale state-planning have lost credibility. However, he assumes that the nature of this "capitalism" is somehow obvious. As he himself recognizes, however, Western capitalism has undergone a profound transformation since the 1970s. The capitalism Giddens assumes to be the only alternative is, in fact, not the capitalism that has existed for most of the 20th century. He clearly means that post-Fordist, multinational capitalism is the only viable economic system currently possible, which necessarily includes the neoliberal regulative regime. However, he then typically equivocates and insists that what is not decided is how this system should be regulated, though he has, in fact, already accepted that it should be. Beyond some vague ideas about extending dialogical democracy to include personal lifestyles,[43] he provides no serious arguments to explain why capitalism is the only viable option. Moreover, by arguing that post-Fordist capitalism, including its regime of regulation, is the only option, he has narrowed the debate over regulation to the smallest possible area. In saying that post-Fordist capitalism requires only peripheral tampering, rather than profound and radical democratization, he supports the *status quo*. He endorses the current consensus between multinationals, states, consumers and citizens, instead of recognizing the democratic deficit and levels of inequality and exploitation in this order.

(B) The Vindication of the Post-Fordist Individual. Giddens is eager to differentiate his optimistic descriptions of the post-traditional individual from neoliberal, rational-choice notions of agency. Citing Ulrich Beck, he insists that "the new individualism is 'not Thatcherism, not market individualism, nor atomization'."[44] Although he refuses to accept that his notion of the post-traditional individual has any connection with the neoliberal entrepreneur, his emphasis on the increasingly autonomous individual reflects and vindicates the notion of the individual that is widely drawn upon in political debates. Giddens may differentiate himself from specifically neoliberal notions of the rational individual, but his post-traditional individual echoes dominant notions found in neoliberal discourse.

The affinity between Giddens' post-traditional individual and dominant post-Fordist notions of agency appear at their starkest when his

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.
43. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), pp. 12 and 18.
44. Giddens, *The Third Way, op.cit.*, p. 36.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

descriptions of contemporary subjectivity are counterposed to alternative accounts of contemporary individuality. In his analysis of postmodernity, Frederic Jameson discusses new forms of individuality. He compares Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes (deliberately chosen because they were the subject of a hermeneutic interpretation by Heidegger) and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Shoes* to demonstrate the difference between the subjectivity of modernity and that which is now becoming dominant. As Heidegger argued, Van Gogh's peasant shoes are part of a whole which they embody and communicate.[45] The power of Van Gogh's painting lies in the fact that the shoes are embedded in and illuminate the culture that finds these peasant shoes meaningful; the painting does not merely represent the shoes as external objects, but illustrates the meaning peasant culture has within modern culture. For Jameson, the illumination of a tradition by Van Gogh's painting presumes a notion of an authentic subject who is steeped in a tradition and, therefore, the shoes speak to him. The painting points to the cultural understandings that it shares with the viewer. Modernist paintings operate around notions of depth and the search for a higher unity of the subject within a tradition that overcomes the fragmentation and alienation of modernity.[46]

By contrast, Warhol's *Diamond Shoes* serve no such purpose and have no such subject in mind. Warhol's picture is depthless and he "does not speak to us" and "in no way completes the hermeneutic gesture."[47] Rather, Warhol's painting announces and presupposes a new kind of subject.[48] With this repudiation of depth goes the transcendence of the subject's alienation in favor of the mere fragmentation of the subject.[49] The postmodern subject becomes a mere surface on which commodified images play and in which the individual disappears under a pastiche of trivial styles. Instead of being the deepest expression of human individuality, the human body becomes a glossy skin for postmodern fetishization. For Jameson, this fragmentation of the now flattened subject is logically consonant with postmodern capitalism. The fragmentation of the subject widens the forms of consumption in which individuals can now engage, because they are no longer burdened by a sense of authentic selves tied to particular social traditions with others. The flattened subject implied by

45. Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 6-7.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Warhol's shoes is the appropriate self, unconstrained by emotional or social attachments to a wider tradition.

There are important parallels between Jameson's notion of the post-modern, fragmented subject and Giddens' post-traditional plastic subject. For both, the new form of subjectivity is rendered possible by globalized markets. But this subjectivity also assists in the development of multinational capitalism, which has produced a vast panoply of new commodities. For both Giddens and Jameson, the subject is no longer committed to an authentic life-style through embeddedness in tradition. Subjects no longer find their place in communally meaningful activity but freely indulge in personally and temporally pleasurable activities, like plastic sexuality. For the postmodern, post-traditional subject, meaning is the pleasure provided by consumption. Yet, where Jameson looks critically on the new fragmented and flattened subject as an obliteration of meaning and an incarceration by economic forces, Giddens celebrates this transition as a liberation. While Jameson criticizes contemporary culture, Giddens' later writing celebrates an individuality which echoes dominant notions of the consuming individual and which is only possible within post-Fordist capitalism. By highlighting this putative emancipation, Giddens persistently obscures those exploitative aspects which make that individualistic emancipation possible.

Giddens' blindness toward the political and economic context and, therefore, to relations of power which give rise to the post-traditional individual, is nowhere more clear than in his engagement with Foucault's writings on sexuality. Foucault insists that even the most apparently intimate sexual practices are inevitably contoured by social discourses embodying power: individual sexuality is only constituted through the wider networks of power-knowledge, which make any particular set of intimate relations possible. "We must not make the mistake of thinking that sex is an autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power. On the contrary, sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures."[50] Giddens rejects this thesis. He claims that Foucault's notion of power as permeating society implies that power is independent of

50. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*, tr.by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 55.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

human agency.[51] In point of fact, although Foucault sometimes writes as if power were indeed separate from individual relations, there is little doubt that Foucault intends to ground power in relations: "For let us not deceive ourselves; if we speak of structures of mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others. The term 'power' designates relations between partners."[52]

Having wrongly accused Foucault of separating power from agency, Giddens returns to the very atomistic and solipsistic account of sex that Foucault's analysis of sexuality was intended to undermine. Against Foucault's location of modern sexuality within networks of power relations between individuals, Giddens describes the emergence and transformation of modern sexuality in wholly individualist terms. For Giddens, the development of 19th century bourgeois sexual practices was the outgrowth of personal reflexivity, whereby individuals sought to gain greater control over their lives.[53] Individuals sequestered the experience of sex in the private domestic sphere through reflexive attempts to gain control over themselves and their reproduction. The development of contraception was a widespread example of this reflexive project of the self, and Giddens regards the dramatic change in sexual attitudes in the 1960s as the triumph of this emancipating reflexivity. Even the problems modern reflexive individuals face in their sexual practices are personal, indicative of ontological security and existential doubt — "the feeling that one is worthless, one's life is empty and one's body is an inadequate device"[54] — rather than social issues of exclusion, subordination or exploitation. For Giddens, Foucault underplays individual autonomy, and fails to recognize the genuinely emancipatory advances individuals have made, which Giddens persistently attempts to rectify by a rigorously individualistic account of sexuality.

In fact, Giddens' account of the transformation of sexuality as the growth of individual reflexivity presupposes the very social conditions Foucault highlights. The development of contraception was not primarily the outgrowth of a myriad of personal decisions, but its adoption in the private sphere was the result of wider public debates about sexuality, including the state's concern with social order and population or, as Foucault puts it, with "bio-power." Giddens occasionally recognizes that this wider

51. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy, op. cit.*, pp. 24 and 171-173

52. Michel Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and Power," tr. by Leslie Sawyer, in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1982), p. 217.

53. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy, op. cit.*, pp.175-182.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

context is an essential element in the constitution of sexuality. Thus, having argued that the key factor in the development of modern sexuality was individual reflexivity, he reverses his position: "The sequestering of sexuality occurred largely as a result of social rather than psychological repression and concerned two things above all: the confinement or denial of female sexual responsiveness and the generalized acceptance of male sexuality as unproblematic."[55]

Confirming that individual female (and by extension, male) sexuality was constituted by the wider social context and, therefore, by the general distribution of power relations, Giddens concedes that "the repressions of the Victorian era and after were in some respects all too real."[56] In the end, Giddens' has to draw on the very Foucauldian account of sexuality he putatively rejects, in order to sustain his own flawed theory of individualistically-created sexuality. Given that sexuality has always been constituted through wider social networks, which include elements of power, it is naïve to assume that the transformations of sexual attitudes in the 1960s can be read off as evidence of increasing individual freedom. Like Victorian sexuality, contemporary practices are created by wider social, political and economic networks. To claim that current sexual practices simply free the individual is to legitimate those institutions which have, if anything, overtaken the state in their documentation and discussion of all manner of sexual performance.

Giddens never seriously considers the implications of the socio-historical construction of intimacy, but sees it as a secluded lagoon which has silted itself off from the political and social context. Even when he sees the connection, he typically fails to recognize its import. Indeed, he goes to some length to disconnect contemporary sexual practices from wider social and economic circumstances. Thus, Giddens dismisses the link between sexuality and the market, because "there is plenty of evidence that sexuality is worrying, disturbing, fraught with tensions. Pleasure is hedged about with too many countervailing tendencies to make plausible the idea that sexuality forms the centerpoint of a hedonistic consumer society."[57] While sexuality can stimulate feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, the claim that sexuality is too disturbing to be central to consumer society is contradicted by Giddens' counterclaim in the preceding paragraph that, "sexuality generates pleasure; and pleasure, or at least

55. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy, op. cit.*, pp. 177-8.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the promise of it, provides a leverage for marketing goods in capitalistic society. Sexual imagery appears almost everywhere in the marketplace as a sort of gigantic selling ploy."[58] The celebratory use of such sexual imagery in advertising campaigns does not preclude personal anxieties about sex. But these images trade on ideal notions of sexual performance and gratification, and their message is that the consumer's sexual insecurities will be erased by the purchase of some particular commodity. Once again, Giddens accepts at one moment what he rejects at another. He recognizes that any contemporary form of intimacy is bound up with the wider context, but he consistently and paradoxically denies this fact and insists that personal sexuality can be devolved from wider economic flows. In this, his vindication of the post-Fordist individual echoes his political ameliorism, for he inevitably fails to consider the implications of the social realities that he fleetingly recognizes.

Although Giddens generally disconnects the post-traditional individual from the system, in his later writing he occasionally recognizes that there is a direct link between individual choice and wider global markets. At these moments, however, his vindication of the post-Fordist era is not called into question. On the contrary, since the system facilitates the development of lagoons of personal pleasure, the system is seen as unproblematically liberating. The post-traditional individual is, at certain moments, seen as not only the product of globalization, but also essential to the reproduction of the system in typical structurationist fashion. Consequently, Giddens argues that "the overriding stress of the book [*Modernity and Self-Identity*] is on the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which are shaped by — yet also shape — the institutions of modernity."[59] The post-traditional individual adopts practices appropriate to wider institutional realities and simultaneously reproduces the very systems that were the medium of action in the first place. The emancipatory potential of post-Fordism is unproblematically tied to the reproduction of its political-economic structure. The liberated individual now reproduces a system that thrives on the emancipation of the plastic individual.

This is not to deny that certain forms of freedom and fulfillment are possible within post-Fordist society, as they are in any social form. But Giddens persistently underemphasizes the intense political and economic struggles in favor of a celebration of private, sexual relations. By highlighting the putative development of new forms of private freedom, where individuals

58. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can always do otherwise, he becomes the key apologist for post-Fordist modes of domination. Consequently, Nietzsche's rejection of the "the whole of sociology in England and France" a century ago "because it knows from experience only the decaying forms of society and takes its own decaying instincts with perfect innocence as the norm of sociological value judgement"[60] is still valid for Giddens today. Given his Parsonesque prominence on the international academic stage, such facile vindication of contemporary social life marks a serious and widespread retreat from critique.

Conclusion

Giddens' later writings are inseparable from the social order he seeks to analyze. They are not so much a critical analysis of post-Fordist regimes as their vindication, for even when he identifies the central conflicts in this society, he fails to recognize their import. In particular, he normalizes the idea of the individual as a freely choosing agent, which is a central motif in contemporary culture. It would be equally reprehensible to go the other way, as some Marxists do, and insist that post-Fordism is an essentially exploitative order systematically denying all individual fulfillment. This makes a mockery of the widespread consent this social form has commanded. However, it is also necessary to recognize when theories become part of the social reality they describe, and uncritically support the values of the historical period of which they are a product.

As Gadamer has argued, it may be impossible to transcend one's historical conditions, and all that can be achieved through a fusion of horizons is an effective historical consciousness.[61] Yet, by demonstrating the unrecognized link between Giddens' later writings and the historical period in which he writes, it may be possible to provide a more self-conscious and historically-aware account, even though it will not transcend all historical prejudices. Ironically, Giddens' later writings fail to perform the very role of reflexive self-criticism he marks out as the distinguishing feature of "post-traditional culture." They do not question the social order which gives rise to them, but unintentionally reproduce the very traditions of which they are a part. Giddens has become one of those guardians of the truth and tradition that reflexive modernization has rendered obsolete.

---

60. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 91.

61. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, tr. by Garrett Barden and Johan Cumming (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 273.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Political Science

A Journal of Politics & Culture

MANAGING EDITOR
George Katsiaficas, *Wentworth Institute, MA, USA*

Supported by the Executive Committee of the Caucus for a New Political Science and an Editorial Board

New Political Science is the official journal of the Caucus for a New Political Science (CNPS), an organized section of the American Political Science Association. The CNPS was formed in order to help make the study of politics relevant to the struggle for a better world; ***New Political Science*** serves as an organ for its goals and interests.

The focus of the journal is to develop analyses which reflect a commitment to progressive social change and which treat topics that are in exploratory phases of development in political science. It insists upon the broadest possible definition of 'politics', and holds that political and cultural development cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Each issue contains a combination of peer-reviewed scholarly articles and book reviews. Both themed and un-themed issues are published.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

1999 - Volume 21 (4 issues) ISSN 0739-3148
Institutional rate: £118.00; North America US$160.00
Personal rate: £50.00; North America US$34.00

http://www.carfax.co.uk/nps-ad.htm

ORDER FORM nps

PLEASE COMPLETE IN BLOCK CAPITALS AND RETURN TO THE ADDRESS BELOW

Please invoice me at the ☐ **institutional rate** ☐ **personal rate**

☐ Please send me an inspection copy

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

E-mail _____

Carfax Publishing • PO Box 25 • Abingdon • Oxfordshire OX14 3UE • UK
Visit the Carfax Home Page at **http://www.carfax.co.uk** for Journals News SARA Online

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Posting Modernity to the Past?

John W. Tate

The prefix "post" in the terms "postmodern," "postmodernism," and "postmodernity" implies that in some way modernity has been relegated either to a historical past or a moral obsolescence. This supposed transition from modernity to postmodernity, however, is inherently ambiguous, because modernity's limits are by no means self-evident. Its finality, therefore, is by no means clear. This is due, not least, to the fact that the very *meaning* of modernity as either a historical epoch or a normative project is open to question. Thus, the boundaries of modernity, which would have to be transcended by a distinctive *postmodern* period, are contested. This ambiguity concerning the meaning of modernity and its status in relation to the present is evident in the fact that two otherwise very different philosophers, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, have both moved *against* postmodernism's relegation of modernity to a "past" by defending modernity's "present" status, despite their entirely divergent views of modernity. The following focuses on the debate between Foucault and Habermas over the status of modernity, as a means of questioning postmodern attempts to *post* modernity to the *past*.

Postmodernism claims that modernity has been relegated to the past: either historically, as a by-gone era; or morally, as having reached a point of normative exhaustion where it can no longer inspire hope or confidence in its own future. However, this attempt to *post* modernity to the *past* is fundamentally *ironic*, because modernity's own self-understanding has always been imbued with a sense of its own *avant-garde* commitment to the future, to whose realization it has been willing to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sacrifice the present to the past.[1] Such a commitment did not begin with the artistic modernism of the early 20th century, but rather characterized the origins of modernity within the Enlightenment, particularly in its concept of progress, where it was the rights of the future that had priority over the claims of the present. For instance, French *philosophes* explicitly appealed to the *future* as the only reliable judge of their present efforts.[2] A German *Aufklärer* such as Immanuel Kant insisted that the future was the sphere of freedom, because it was not limited by the constraints of the present.[3] The Enlightenment privileged the future over the present, because the present was defined by the constraints

---

1. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 119; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. ix, xii. In making these claims, postmodernists reverse the self-understanding of modernity as a progressive and contemporary epoch. For instance, in indicting modernity on moral grounds, as no longer having normative potential, postmodernists such as Lyotard have charged it with the very oppression which, at a moral level, it claimed to be committed to eradicating. As Lyotard states: "All the tragedies we have lived through, first with colonialism, then with fascism, finally the concentration camps, all this has taken shape not in opposition to or in contradiction with so-called humanism in the form in which we have been practicing it for several centuries, but I would say almost as its natural continuation." See Jean-François Lyotard "Defining the Postmodern" *ICA Documents* 4 (1985) p. 6. Of course, this "reversal" had characterized the critique of modernity articulated many years earlier by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who claimed that far from being associated with emancipation, the Enlightenment roots of modernity were "totalitarian." See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1972), p. 6. Such a critique parallels much earlier "reversals" of the Enlightenment's emancipatory claims by conservatives such as Edmund Burke, who in 1790 argued that: "On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings, and which is as void of solid wisdom, as it is destitute of all taste and elegance, laws are to be supported only by their own terrors. . . . In the groves of their academy, at the end of every visto, you see nothing but the gallows." See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 171-172.

2. As D'Alembert wrote in 1759: "A most remarkable change in our ideas is taking place, one of such rapidity that it seems to promise a greater change still to come. It will be for the future to decide the aim, the nature and the limits of this revolution, the drawbacks and disadvantages of which posterity will be able to judge better than we can." See D'Alembert, no reference, cited in Hugh Honor, *Neo-Classicism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 17. Italics added.

3. Thus, in envisaging the future, and human progress within it, Kant states: "For what the highest degree may be at which mankind may have to come to a stand, and how great a gulf may still have to be left between the idea and its realization, are questions which no one can, or ought to, answer. For the issue depends on freedom; and it is in the power of freedom to pass beyond any and every specified limit." See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1963), B374.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which had to be overcome if progress was to occur, while the future was the potential embodiment of progress itself.[4]

Consequently, the postmodern concept of modernity as an epoch or attitude whose "limits" can be relegated to the past is inherently ironic, because modernity's future focus meant that it conceived its own limits in the present as purely temporary and contingent, capable of being transcended in its concerted orientation toward the future.[5] This self-consciousness of modernity, arising from the Enlightenment, problematizes any attempt to define its historical or moral boundaries as "limits" that can be transgressed or relegated to the past, because such limits were always contingent upon the future.[6]

Modernity as a Normative Project?

Following his Enlightenment predecessors, Habermas has argued that modernity can be understood not only as a historical epoch, but also as a normative project embodying definite goals of rationalization, democratization, and emancipation.[7] He situates the roots of this modern project in the Enlightenment when he states: "The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in

---

4. The most fervent Enlightenment proselyte of such an ideal was Condorcet, who declares that ". . . no limit has been set to the improvement of human faculties . . . the perfectibility of man is really boundless . . . the progress of this perfectibility, henceforth independent of any power that would arrest it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe where nature has set us. No doubt progress will be more or less rapid, but there will never be any retrogression." See Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, cited in Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 233. While Condorcet's optimism may have been excessive even for the Enlightenment, nevertheless, as already indicated, his belief in the unlimited potential of the future was shared by more sober contemporaries such as Kant.

5. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, tr. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 6-7; Ernst Behler, *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), pp. 3 and 5-6.

6. Although Jean-François Lyotard attempts to reverse the normative self-understanding of modernity (see note 1 above), he nevertheless agrees that the postmodern attempt to post modernity to the past repeats a distinctively "modern" gesture, insofar as it claims for postmodernism exclusive rights to contemporary and future significance, while relegating all preceding periods to a historical or moral redundancy. See Lyotard, "Defining the Postmodern," p. 6. In this respect, Lyotard argues that, far from posting modernity to the past, postmodernism is still "part of the modern." See also Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, tr. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 79.

7. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116 and 344-46.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic. At the same time, this project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains from their esoteric forms. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life — that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday life."[8] Thus, Habermas maintains that, while modernity can be understood in empirical terms as a sociological process of modernization — involving industrialization, bureaucratization, secularization and urbanization — it can also be conceived in normative terms as an unfinished project of emancipation. As he puts it: ". . . the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled. . . . [This] can only be established under the condition that societal modernization will also be steered in a different direction."[9] Habermas argues that, in order to conceive modernity in these normative terms, it is necessary to retain a prescriptive concept of reason capable of distinguishing emancipatory from coercive forms of modernization, and therefore capable of holding these processes morally accountable in terms of their import for human freedom.[10]

Because Habermas is committed to modernity as an "unfinished project" of emancipation, he must reject the postmodern claim that modernity is either historically surpassed or morally discredited. In particular, he must refute the postmodern "reversal" of the modern project's normative claims, where postmodernists argue that its emancipatory promises, emanating from the Enlightenment, yield coercive outcomes. He does this by providing two criticisms of the postmodern critique of modernity — its homogeneous concept of Enlightenment reason and the performative contradiction it encounters once it rejects reason as a source of evaluation.

Habermas' Defense of Modernity's Contemporary Status

Habermas defends modernity as an "unfinished project" by defending its Enlightenment legacy. Specifically, his insistence on a prescriptive model of reason that can separate coercive from emancipatory forms of

8. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity — An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster, ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), p. 9.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 13. See also Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

10. On this normative concept of reason, see Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 127, 296-98, 322-23. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, tr. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 94-95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modernization leads him to distinguish reason in terms of its communicative and instrumental uses.[11] Coercive forms of modernization, especially the development of systemic processes of the administrative state and market economy, rely on instrumental forms of reason to inform their steering mechanisms, while emancipatory forms of modernization, materially embodied in a democratic lifeworld, rely on communicative forms of reason, involving processes of intersubjective understanding.[12] For Habermas, the "unfinished project" of modernity is to extend the claims of the lifeworld to hold the systemic processes of state and economy democratically accountable. This is done by extending the range over which communicative forms of rationality can replace instrumental rationality in determining outcomes.[13]

Thus, Habermas draws a normative distinction between different types of modernization within modernity, based on an internal differentiation within the Enlightenment legacy of reason, which allows him to resist those indictments of modernity that reverse the normative credentials of its Enlightenment legacy by identifying reason as a whole with modernity's repressive outcomes. Such an identification elides the crucial distinction between reason's communicative and instrumental uses, and identifies reason wholly with the latter. Such an undifferentiated, homogeneous concept of reason allows such critics to present an undifferentiated concept of modernity, where reason is inevitably implicated in producing dystopian outcomes.[14] This underpins their claims that the modern project, stemming from the Enlightenment, is morally exhausted and (in the case of some postmodernists) historically surpassed. Habermas identifies such a process of critique not only with contemporary postmodernists, but also with the Frankfurt School.[15]

By differentiating the rational heritage of the Enlightenment in terms

---

11. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-98.

12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, "Reason and the Rationalization of Society," tr. by Thomas McCarthy (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 340-42; *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol II, "Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason," tr. by Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 311, 318; and *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, tr. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 65

13. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 284-85.

14. As Habermas puts it: "The dynamism of self-destruction, in which the secret of the dialectic of enlightenment supposedly comes to light, can only function if reason cannot produce anything from itself except that naked power to which it actually hopes to provide an alternative. . . ." Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a coercive and an emancipatory trajectory, premised on two different models of reason, Habermas sees these contradictory trajectories as played out within the historical unfolding of modernity.[16] This distinction between these modern trajectories means that the normative potential of one is not exhausted by the repressive historical outcomes of the other, so that modernity can still embody an unfinished project of emancipation, despite its historical legacy to the contrary. On the basis of this distinction, far from following the postmodernists and their predecessors in indicting modernity as a whole, Habermas' differentiated concept of Enlightenment reason allows him to claim that the distortion of the Enlightenment's intentions within modernity is explicable ". . . not as an excess but as a deficit of rationality."[17] That is, such dystopian outcomes are a result not of the triumph of Enlightenment reason, as these critics claim, but rather the result of the exclusion of its communicative potential by its more pervasive instrumental application within the state and the economy.

Habermas argues that modernity's critics make an *a priori* connection between reason and coercion, and explain dystopia as an inevitable outcome of the immanent processes of Enlightenment and modernity only because they fail to make this differentiation between different types of reason and the different modern trajectories they generate within the Enlightenment's legacy.[18] He further claims that the attempt to post the modern to the past by rejecting its Enlightenment heritage produces performative contradictions which vitiate these critiques of modernity. In rejecting reason *en bloc*, the total indictment of modernity encounters a performative contradiction, because its validity requires substantiation by the very rational heritage it has eschewed. As Habermas puts it: "Inasmuch as it turns against reason as the foundation of its own validity, critique becomes total. . . . To be sure, this description of the self-destruction of the critical capacity is paradoxical, because in the moment of description it still has to make use of the critique that has been declared dead. It denounces

16. Thus: "Only with the conceptual framework of communicative action do we gain a perspective from which the process of societal rationalization appears as contradictory from the start. The contradiction arises between, on the one hand, a rationalization of everyday communication that is tied to the structures of intersubjectivity of the lifeworld, in which language counts as the genuine and irreplaceable medium of reaching understanding, and, on the other hand, the growing complexity of subsystems of purposive-rational action, in which actions are coordinated through steering media such as money and power." Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 342. See also Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-44.

17. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Enlightenment's becoming totalitarian with [the Enlightenment's] own tools."[19] Thus, Habermas maintains that, in order to retain a critical validity, even in rejecting the Enlightenment and its modern legacy, such critiques must retain elements of the Enlightenment heritage because they ". . . will have to leave at least one rational criterion intact for their explanation of the corruption of all rational criteria."[20] The only other alternative is an irrationalism in which blind assertion replaces reasoned argument.[21]

Habermas defends the contemporary status of modernity by refusing to identify the Enlightenment as a whole with its mutant modern progeny, and, far from condemning the Enlightenment for modernity's dystopian outcomes, he attributes moral responsibility for the coercive and murderous results of modernity to a systematic distortion of Enlightenment intentions, involving the triumph of the instrumental uses of reason within state and economy over its communicative uses in the life-world. He insists that the claims which inform the normative project of modernity must be taken at face value, and their failure explained in terms of a denial of their inherent potential, rather than as an inevitable outcome of their intrinsic nature. By linking the fate of modernity to its normative potential, the "project of modernity" can be conceived as "unfinished," rather than as historically surpassed or morally discredited[22] and thus the continuing relevance of its Enlightenment legacy is reaffirmed. It is this Enlightenment legacy, rather than the historical fate of modernity so far, that must be discredited in any attempt to post the modern to the past. Yet, Habermas believes that the contemporary status of modernity is relatively safe from such a fate, because this Enlightenment legacy cannot be entirely rejected without such critique falling into the irrationalism of performative contradiction.

The Enlightenment link between reason and reform is central to Habermas' concept of modernity as a normative project, because only such a prescriptive status for reason can provide any guarantee that modern

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

21. Habermas describes this "irrationalism," and its relativist consequences, as follows: ". . . if thinking can no longer operate in the element of truth, or of validity claims in general, contradiction and criticism lose their meaning. To contradict, to negate, now has only the sense of 'wanting to be different.'. . . [O]nce all predicates concerning validity are devalued, once it is power and not validity claims that is expressed in value appraisals — by what criterion shall critique still be able to propose discriminations? It must at least be able to discriminate between a power that deserves to be esteemed and one that deserves to be devalued." *Ibid.*, pp. 124-25.

22. Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

developments are indeed "progressive."[23] Stanley Rosen points out that postmodernism rejects all such progressive ideals, and no longer invests any teleological hopes in the historical process at all.[24] Jean Baudrillard articulates a similar view by denying history any wider normative significance beyond its own chronological advance. He argues that, in a postmodern world, it is no longer possible to ascribe any overarching end or purpose to the historical process.[25] Within this more philosophically modest postmodern perspective, the idea of legitimating the historical process in wider normative terms, as in Habermas' ideal of modernity as an "unfinished project," becomes a central "myth" of Enlightenment consciousness, and it is precisely such myths that postmodernism prides itself on having outgrown.[26]

Modernity as Ethos

Foucault problematizes this postmodern rejection of modernity on the grounds of philosophical modesty, insofar as he does not identify modernity with Enlightenment ideals of reason. On the contrary, he identifies modernity with an *ethos* or critical attitude which one adopts toward the world — what he calls a "permanent critique of our historical era."[27] As he puts it: "I know that modernity is often spoken of as an epoch, or at least as a set of features characteristic of an epoch; situated on a calendar, it would be preceded by a more or less naive or archaic premodernity,

---

23. Such guarantees were central to Kant's belief that societal progress could be ensured only through the authority of reason, to whose scrutiny "everything must submit" or else "awaken just suspicion." See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, *op. cit.*, Axiia.

24. As Rosen states: "In the last half of the twentieth century, 'completion' or 'fulfillment' has been replaced by the notion of 'end,' in the sense of the finishing off or dissolving of history. Posthistorical man is no longer man or historical but an unconscious episode of the discontinuity of time." See Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 91.

25. According to Baudrillard: "History can no longer surpass itself, it can no longer envisage its own finality, dream its own end. . . ." See Jean Baudrillard, "The Year 2000 Has Already Happened," in Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, eds., *Body Invaders. Panic Sex in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 38.

26. As John Gray puts it: ". . . the paradoxical character of postmoderns" is that they are ". . . heirs to all the achievements of modernity, but not to its seminal myths." See John Gray, *Post-Liberalism. Studies in Political Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 269. Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman has defined postmodernism precisely in terms of its philosophical modesty relative to modernity's confidence in its own ideals. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120; and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 272.

27. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books), 1984, p. 42.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and followed by an enigmatic and troubling 'postmodernity' . . . I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by 'attitude,' I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*."[28]

In identifying modernity with a critical attitude or an *ethos* that can be continually renewed, Foucault displaces any definite limits or boundaries to modernity, whose transgression would make it capable of being posted to the past by a more sophisticated postmodernity. Further, while he sees the origin of this *ethos* as beginning with Kant's question concerning the status of Enlightenment, he refuses to identify this *ethos* with any of the normative claims for reason upheld by the Enlightenment.[29] As such, he also problematizes the postmodern attempt to dismiss modernity insofar as it rejects its Enlightenment heritage as morally discredited.

Here, there is a strong difference between Foucault and Habermas in their relative concept of the status and justification of modernity. Habermas upholds modernity's Enlightenment credentials, situated around the normative status of reason, and insists that it is these credentials that must be discredited if postmodernism is to make good its claims to have posted modernity to the past. From Foucault's perspective, this is no basis for rejecting modernity as an *ethos*, because this *ethos* only has its origins, not its justification, in the Enlightenment. Indeed, this *ethos* transcends its Enlightenment origins, because its attitude of "permanent critique" is capable of placing even the Enlightenment in question. As Foucault puts it: "I have been seeking, on the one hand, to emphasize the extent to which a type of philosophical interrogation — one that simultaneously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject — is rooted in the Enlightenment. On the other hand, I have been seeking to

28. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

29. Foucault claims that it is with Kant's text, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'," published in 1784, that the *Aufklärung* first begins to question itself about its own status, and therefore questions the philosophical status of the present. See Michel Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth," in Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., *Michel Foucault. Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 88. However Foucault distinguishes this *ethos* of permanent critique, originating in Kant's interrogation of the contemporary status if the Enlightenment, from any of the formal doctrines of the Enlightenment itself — in particular its "analytics of truth" centered around its prescriptive claims for reason. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stress that the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to its doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude — that is, of a philosophical *ethos* that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."[30] Foucault's insistence that his *ethos* be distinguished from the doctrinal elements of its Enlightenment origins is evident in his repudiation of what he calls "Enlightenment blackmail." For Foucault, this "blackmail" is evident in the ". . . simplistic and authoritarian alternative" that ". . . you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism . . . or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality. . . ."[31]

It is precisely this alternative that has distinguished postmodernists who reject the Enlightenment heritage from those, such as Habermas, who wish to defend it. Insofar as postmodernists confront modernity with the disparity between its Enlightenment ideals and its historical practice, in an attempt to establish the moral obsolescence of its normative project, they could be conceived of as reproducing this Enlightenment blackmail in their critique of modernity just as much as Habermas reproduces it in his defense of it. In the case of both, the status of modernity is linked to the fate of the Enlightenment and its normative defense of reason. But it is precisely this demand that modernity be justified or condemned in terms of the Enlightenment that is one manifestation of the "blackmail" Foucault rejects. Foucault would see both Habermas and postmodernists' linkage of the fate of modernity to the legacy of the Enlightenment as an unjustified limitation of the claims of modernity's contemporary status, insofar as he believes these claims transcend any attempt to make them conditional on the continuing relevance of their Enlightenment origins.

Foucault's Ethos *as "Limit Attitude"*

This *ethos* of "permanent critique" gives rise to what Foucault calls a "limit attitude," which further distinguishes his concept of modernity from its Enlightenment origins.[32] As such, Foucault distinguishes the Enlightenment attempt, represented by Kant, to defend the universal status of reason by imposing limits on its legitimate authority, from his *ethos* of "permanent critique," which is committed to the transgression of all

30. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *op. cit.*, p. 42. See also Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth" *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

31. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" p.43.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such limits. As Foucault states: "Criticism consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today . . . is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression. This entails an obvious consequence: that criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves. . . ."[33]

For Foucault, it is the limits the present has imposed, particularly on identities, that ought to be the focus of "permanent critique." Specifically, critique should focus on the possibility of transgressing and displacing these limits. As Foucault puts it, such a critique ". . . will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."[34] He reiterates this ideal of self-transgression when he states: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are."[35] Ironically therefore, with Foucault's *ethos* of permanent critique, modernity is once again understood as a continual displacement of the limits of the present. Foucault makes it clear, however, that he does not conceive of these limits as something demarcated by a definite "inside" and "outside," where one is either "inside" or "outside" modernity depending on whether these limits are retained or transcended. Rather, this *ethos* places all such limits in question in order to move beyond them.[36]

Yet, it is precisely this inside/outside metaphor, applied to presumed points of transition between the limits of modernity and a subsequent postmodernity, which informs much of the modern/postmodern debate. It assumes that one can understand oneself in the present as either inside or outside the limits of modernity or postmodernity, and can somehow accept one while rejecting the other. Foucault's concept of modernity as an *ethos* questions the plausibility of such assumptions (and thus implicitly questions the conceptual possibility of postmodernism itself). Once such a problematizing of limits is seen as the meaning of the modern

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
35. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 216.
36. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *op. cit.*, p. 45.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ethos, then it is no longer apparent how modernity's present could have any limits sufficiently stable (in a conceptual sense) for postmodernism to claim to have unambiguously moved beyond them, or at least to have relegated them to the past. This is because it is precisely this present and these limits that are being questioned by Foucault's modern *ethos*.[37] Consequently, the very issue of what would be the limits of a modernity which postmodernity could transcend, so constituting a distinctive historical epoch or new cultural or moral attitude, is rendered ambiguous by Foucault's concept of a modern *ethos* whose critical process involves a continual problematization of the limits of modernity itself.

Foucault's Ethic of Transgression

One might expect that, once Foucault's *ethos* has been pursued by transgressing the limits the present imposes, this *ethos* would lead to a greater sense of autonomy or independence. Indeed, Foucault at one point says that this *ethos*, with its limit attitude, ". . . is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom."[38] Yet, this would imply that this *ethos* has somehow identified a "true" or "fundamental" self hidden behind the limits of the present, and the structures of power it incorporates — and that the liberation of this repressed identity would be coextensive with the realization of liberty itself. But Foucault denies this possibility when he rejects ". . . the idea that under power with its acts of violence, and its artifice, we should be able to rediscover the things themselves in their primitive vivacity: behind the asylum walls, the spontaneity of madness; through the penal system, the generous fever of delinquency; under the sexual interdict, the freshness of desire."[39] Foucault can deny these possibilities of liberation, because he does not

37. Foucault articulates this as follows: "All this . . . might well be said to characterize philosophy as the discourse of modernity on modernity. . . . What is my present? What is the meaning of this present? And what am I doing when I speak of this present? This, it seems to me, is what this new questioning of modernity means." Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth," *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

38. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"*op. cit.*, p. 46.

39. Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20. Unlike the liberal and democratic traditions which have always defined liberty as independent of power, to the extent that it is limited by power, for Foucault liberty is not defined by the limits of power at all. This is because, for Foucault, there is nothing independent of processes of power to liberate — since such processes are constitutive of identity itself. As he writes: "I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of 'liberation' and another is of the order of 'oppression' . . . I do not think that there is anything that is functionally — by its very nature — absolutely liberating." See Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acknowledge any "true" self hidden behind the processes of discourse and power that could be liberated from them, but rather sees these processes of power as constitutive of the very self.[40]

Here lies the fundamental distance between Foucault's *ethos* and the Enlightenment project of emancipation embodied in Habermas' unfinished project of modernity. The Enlightenment always insisted on the ultimate possibility of creating social forms which could give expression to human liberty — a vision best expressed in Rousseau's ideal of ". . . a form of association . . . under which each individual, while uniting himself with all the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before."[41] Far from following the Enlightenment in proposing the possibility of liberty outside the limits of the present, which can be attained by transgressing those limits, Foucault's *ethos* can only propose an ethic of transgression as a perpetual end in itself. In other words, without the possibility of "liberty" as a goal to be achieved, liberty becomes a practice requiring a continual, agonistic transgression of the limits defining the present.[42] It is only in this agonistic context that an *ethos* defined as the "permanent critique of our historical era" makes sense, since a critique requires "permanence" only if it lacks a goal whose achievement would make such critique no longer necessary.

Habermas Versus Foucault

It is in the context of this divergence between Foucault's *ethos* and Enlightenment expectations that Habermas' critique of Foucault must be

---

40. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. I (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 32, 47, 77 and 103-106. While Foucault's modern *ethos* does not offer the possibility of discovering or liberating a "true" self, it does offer the possibility of creating a self, which offers some ideal of personal independence in the context of wider processes of power. This is the basis for Foucault's elevation of Baudelaire's *dandysme* as a distinctively modern practice: "Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself." See Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *op. cit.*, p. 42. On Foucault's invocation of Baudelaire's *dandysme* as a modern ethic, see James Schmidt and Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self," in Michael Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 301-302.

41. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* tr. by Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), book I, chapter vi, p. 60.

42. Hence Foucault defines his *ethos* of permanent critique as a ". . . work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty." See Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *op. cit.*, p. 50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

understood. For Habermas, Foucault's modern *ethos* is indistinguishable from postmodern positions, since both reject the defense of modernity in terms of its Enlightenment claims — a defense Habermas sees as crucial to the normative idea of modernity as an "unfinished project."[43] As such, Habermas would see what Foucault refers to as "Enlightenment blackmail" as the necessary rational demand required of any attempt to substantiate the progressive potential of the present. Indeed, in a testimonial to Foucault after his death, Habermas once again raised these Enlightenment demands in regard to Foucault's work, insisting that Foucault encountered the inevitable performative contradiction that arises once one makes critical claims and yet rejects the models of reason that are the only basis for justifying them. Thus, Habermas criticizes ". . . the contradiction in which Foucault becomes entangled when he opposes his critique of power . . . to the analytic of the true in such a way that the former is deprived of the normative standards it would have to derive from the latter."[44] On the other hand, it is by defining his philosophical *ethos* of permanent critique in terms of a "limit attitude" that Foucault is able to avoid all demands that he submit this *ethos* to Enlightenment norms of justification. This is because, from the perspective of this limit attitude, Enlightenment doctrines are simply one more limit defining the present that ought to be overcome.

Habermas and Foucault approach modernity from very different perspectives, one in terms of the continuing relevance of Enlightenment demands, and the other outside of them.[45] Yet, despite these differences,

---

43. Consequently, Habermas directly impugns Foucault's genealogical method with the "irrationalism" he associates with postmodernism generally, insofar as neither is capable of defending ultimate validity claims in terms of reason alone, because neither can conceive of reason as a normative source independent of power. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 249, 278. The result, according to Habermas, is that Foucault's genealogical method gives rise to a pervasive relativism that renders it incapable of morally distinguishing between different processes of discourse and power in terms of their implications for normative goals such as emancipation: "Genealogical historiography is supposed to reach behind discourse totalities (within which alone disputes over norms and values occur) with a strictly descriptive attitude. It brackets normative validity claims as well as claims to propositional truth and abstains from the question of whether some discourse and power formations could be more legitimate than others." *Ibid.*, p. 282. For detailed discussion of Habermas' critique of Foucault's methodology, see Michael Kelly, "Foucault, Habermas, and the Self-Referentiality of Critique," in Kelly, ed., *op. cit.*; James Schmidt, "Habermas and Foucault," in Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, eds., *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

44. Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's What Is Enlightenment?" in Kelly ed., *op. cit.*, p. 154.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both Habermas and Foucault provide a counterpoint to the postmodernists in that they both propose a defense of modernity as a "contemporary" epoch that has definite claims to both the present and the future. Both Habermas and Foucault, therefore, refuse to post modernity to the past.

Habermas, Foucault, and Intellectual Suspicions

Not all postmodernists conceive postmodernity as a definitively new epoch that has relegated modernity to a historical past, but rather see it as a cultural configuration within a broader modern epoch.[46] Nevertheless, they still insist that a new attitude or outlook has displaced a distinctively modern perspective, involving a new set of values and orientations. Either way, postmodernists must post modernity to the past, in historical, cultural or moral terms, if they are to substantiate their claims for postmodernity. It is precisely such an attempt that Habermas and Foucault resist, despite their very different concepts of modernity.

What Foucault and Habermas' disagreement over the character of modernity reveals, however, is the inherently subjective character of the modernity/postmodernity debate. Insofar as any attempt to conceive of a modern or postmodern epoch or attitude inevitably involves a subjective attempt to theoretically encapsulate, in some sort of synoptic order and coherence, otherwise highly disparate and multifarious historical and cultural processes, such definitions are subject to the vagaries of the theoretical perspectives and definitions of individual intellectuals. The sort of incommensurable outlooks this can produce is evident in the fact that, what Foucault conceives as a modern *ethos*, Habermas would reject as a distinctively "postmodern" attempt to do away with the Enlightenment heritage. Alternatively, while Habermas and many postmodernists link the fate of modernity to the fate of the Enlightenment, Foucault would reject this as an instance of "Enlightenment blackmail."

In the absence of objective referents demarcating modernity and postmodernity, perhaps the sort of definitions within which intellectuals like Habermas and Foucault trade ultimately become self-fulfilling, to the extent that one lives in the sort of modern (or even postmodern) age that

---

45. On these wider differences between Habermas and Foucault, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'," in David Couzens Hoy, eds., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 109-110.

46. On the claim that postmodernity is a new cultural configuration within modernity, see Behler, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5, and Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one thinks oneself to be in, thus performatively confirming modern or postmodern expectations in practice. Perhaps, therefore, these expectations are ultimately quixotic. Just as Don Quixote was, for all subjective intents and purposes, "feudal" in both attitude and epoch, simply because he believed himself to be so, perhaps one is modern or postmodern in the same agonistic way. But, in such a context, the ambiguity involved in any attempt to "post modernity to the past" becomes pervasive, due to the fact that the theoretical idiosyncrasy and the arbitrary, self-fulfilling assertions of individual intellectuals come to be seen as governing historical and cultural claims within the modernity/postmodernity debate.

Yet, once it is accepted that arbitrary intellectual assertion can become the ruling capital in the modernity/postmodernity issue, then ambiguity extends to envelop all normative claims made within this context. This affects Habermas's position far more profoundly than Foucault's, because Habermas' defense of modernity is dependent on asserting the rights of strong normative themes, such as emancipation, reason, and reform. It is not clear what these terms could mean, or what value they could have in a context where they were suspected of being merely the arbitrary assertions of an individual intellectual, rather than the normatively grounded visions of modernity itself, arising from its Enlightenment origins. Foucault is able to deal with this level of ambiguity far more effectively, since his idea of the modern *ethos* is to place in question all frameworks and parameters in a process of permanent criticism, where the limits of this process and the ambiguity it encounters is itself always open to question. Thus, Foucault's *ethos* has the resilience to cope with increasing levels of intellectual ambiguity, if the suspicions concerning the claims of intellectuals and the motivations which inform them ever escalate into a crisis of confidence in this "new class."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes, Documents and Commentaries:

Theology as a Pseudo-Ecology? Reply to Manussos Marangudakis

Simon Oliver

Manussos Marangudakis traces the roots of environmental concern within both Left and Right political thought.[1] He examines the anti-technological and occasionally authoritarian stances of Hamsun, Williamson, Haeckel and Heidegger, and their associations with National Socialism, and compares them to the more recent ideologies of Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Eco-Socialism and Social Ecology, and their politics of egalitarianism, equality and autonomy. He concludes that, insofar as ecologists have opted for nature as the prominent pole in the nature and culture divide, their politics has become a pseudo-religion, with "the natural" providing the objective and transcendent source of a new politics and ethics: "Unless we wish to bring back God as a medium to transcend and thus to consolidate the two incompatible categories of nature and society, a choice must be made between them."[2]

Faced with this choice, Marangudakis cautiously opts for "an alternative social framework predicated on small communities, grass-roots democracy and ecological sensitivity, rather than on an ecological ontology. . . ."[3] Yet, the recovery of a transcendent and theological understanding of nature and culture is precisely what is required. The division of nature and culture, which Marangudakis does not question, is a fundamental aspect of both ecologism and of the very modernity with which both Left and Right are frequently at odds. As Bruno Latour shows, however, this division is collapsing, resulting in a confused debate around ecological issues, because the natural is no longer identifiable.[4] In addition to Marangudakis' assessment of anti-technological writers such as Heidegger

1. Manussos Marangudakis, "Ecology as a Pseudo-religion?" in *Telos* 112 (Summer 1998), pp. 107-124.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
4. Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, tr. by Catherine Porter (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Williamson, the more recent arrival of Marxist cyborg feminism needs to be considered, particularly the work of Donna Haraway and its turn to technology as a means of "reinventing" nature and thus reconfiguring the relation between nature and culture. But such an embrace of technology does not reconfigure nature and culture, because it ignores the mimetic character of technology and the need for a transcendent and therefore theological vision of nature and culture. Furthermore, the division of nature and culture, and the consequent rise of ecologism needs to be examined, at least in part, to the move away from traditional theological understandings and toward a secular immanentism in the late mediaeval and early modern period. John Duns Scotus is examined as one example of a theologian who made possible the secularization of traditionally theological concepts. Marangudakis is right that "the lack of mystical metaphysics in secularism and in Protestant dogma, the decline of traditional Western religions, and the trust in people's ability to rule the world, have created a spiritual vacuum." Thus, it may be necessary to recover an orthodox, but radical theological vision of nature and culture that does not resort to the spirituality of an all-too-modern nature.

Modernity and the Dualism of Nature and Culture

Latour identifies two practices as definitive of modernity. The first, termed "purification," is the tendency to separate the natural realm from human culture, "that of human beings on the one hand; that of non-humans on the other."[5] Such a practice informs the classification of subjects, policies, organisms or ethics as either natural or cultural. The second, "translation," "creates mixtures between entirely new types of being, hybrids of nature and culture."[6] This creation of hybrids of nature and culture can link the most diverse phenomena in a continuous stream of the simultaneously natural and cultural: "the chemistry of the upper atmosphere, scientific and industrial strategies, the preoccupations of heads of state, the anxieties of ecologists."'[7] Latour claims that the work of purifying nature and culture makes possible the creation of hybrids, and that, conversely, the creation of hybrids makes possible the work of purification.[8] These simultaneous practices are characteristic of the modern constitution.[9] Science can mediate the non-human natural realm, while the "humanities" refer to culture, its history and society. Hybrids of nature and culture link the natural and the cultural in an unbroken thread. For example, discussions of the phenomenon of the depletion of the ozone layer can link the melting of the polar ice-caps, the kinds of crops that can be produced in northern Europe,

5. *Ibid.*, p. 10f.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
8. Stephen Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
9. Latour claims that this constitution was never realized, because it involves, first, the claim that nature and culture are ontologically separate, and, second, the continuation of the contradictory practices of purification and translation. *Ibid.*, p. 47f.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the forms of energy used to heat homes, and transportation methods. Latour claims that the modern constitution is failing, because the creation of hybrids of nature and culture is now increasingly visible and uncontrolled.

Although the division of nature and culture continually attempts to reassert itself (e.g., through genetic engineering, in which nature is to be discovered, "mapped" and manipulated, while apparently remaining separate from human cultural interference and interpretation), the division of nature and culture is collapsing. Certain phenomena can no longer be classified definitively as natural or cultural. Thus: "The ozone hole is too social and narrated to be truly natural; the strategy of industrial firms and heads of state is too full of chemical reactions to be reduced to [the culture of] power and interests."[10] These hybrids resist purification as either natural or cultural. In the modern liberal university, the faculties of natural science, politics, economics, history, philosophy and sociology all offer their analyses of the problem of global warming or genetically modified foods in a confused and failed attempt to identify these phenomena as either natural or cultural. The result is a nebulous debate surrounding ecological issues, because modernity relies on the classification of phenomena as either natural or cultural prior to commencing any analysis. Marangudakis argues that ecologists working within this modern framework must prioritize either nature or culture. However, it is increasingly difficult to do this, because one no longer can identify the boundary between nature and culture. Indeed, such a choice may no longer be possible.

The modern constitution, within which this choice to prioritize nature or culture must be made, requires three "guarantees." The first, relates to nature: even though nature is identified through cultural practices and methods of investigation, it must remain transcendent and uncreated. Thus, for those who align themselves with Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism, nature must be transcendent and definitive of an objective politics and ethics. But nature must also be immanent, definable and identifiable by certain cultural practices. If nature were not in some sense immanent, it would be forever remote and hostile. Nature is not to be defined by any scientific enquiry, but must always be available for discovery and be identifiable through the experimental method. It is to resist all contamination by cultural practices, and yet remain accessible to such practices.[11] The second guarantee claims that, although society transcends attempts at re-creation, prediction, manipulation or control, society must be understood as a human creation. Thus, the realm of culture must transcend the individuals who have created it in order to attain some degree of permanence and the ability to mobilize society to common tasks and goals, while also remaining the product of human will and preference.

These two guarantees of the modern constitution are mirror images of each

10. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

11. On the creation of nature by cultural and scientific practice, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Klaus Eder, *The Social Construction of Nature* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other. They both rely on the simultaneous play of transcendence and immanence. Regardless of the pole selected by the ecologist, nature and culture must both be immanent and transcendent at the same time. They must be the former in order to maintain accessibility to or the dominance of the human will; they must be the latter in order to provide the objectivity which can define an ethics or politics, or orientate capital and labor to common ends. Latour examines this constitution with reference to the debate between Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century.[12] Boyle maintained that the experimental life could yield an objective nature which preceded all scientific interference. Meanwhile, the sophisticated cultural practices and regulations of the laboratory were definitive of the very questions, results and interpretations of phenomena which emerged from investigations of nature. For Hobbes, Leviathan was maintained as a construction of the wills of the creator-citizens. But Hobbes recruited increasing numbers of natural categories in order to preserve Leviathan and to maintain its transcendence in the face of competing citizens' claims. Both Boyle and Hobbes maintained the continuous alternation of transcendence and immanence in their identification of nature and culture. It was not that Hobbes selected the cultural and Boyle the natural pole.[13] Boyle's naturalism was avowedly cultural in being created through "literary, mechanical and social technologies,"[14] while Hobbes' cultural politics was always a natural determinism. This reveals the impossibility of a thoroughgoing prioritization of nature or culture in the formulation of any politics, ethics or account of nature. The selection of either pole requires the contradiction of simultaneous transcendence and immanence.

Latour also outlines a further crucial guarantee of the modern constitution: a bracketed God.[15] Within the modern division of nature and culture, the divine must be removed from the dualism,[16] while also remaining deployable should a

12. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 15ff. For a detailed discussion of the dispute between Boyle and Hobbes, see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

13. This is a qualification of Latour's interpretation. He implies that Hobbes and Boyle represent, respectively, the cultural and natural poles. See Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 25f.

14. Shapin and Schaffer, *op. cit.*, p. 25ff.

15. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 32f.

16. See William T. Cavanaugh, " 'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House:' The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October 1995), pp. 397-420. Cavanaugh traces the rise of the state prior to religious wars in the 16th and 17th centuries, and notes that "religion" (a concept which arose in this period) became a private matter of personal choice. Meanwhile, the allegiance of the individual was directed to the state, which held the monopoly on the means of discipline and coercion: "What is left to the Church is increasingly the purely interior government of the souls of its members; their bodies are handed over to the secular authorities" (p. 399). Not only is God extricated from matters of public concern, but the doctrinal conflicts between "religions" are directed by state rulers to secular political ends. The relation of the individual to other members of the Church and therefore ultimately to God is replaced by the individual's definitive relation to the Sovereign. See also John Bossy, *Christianity and the West: 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conflict arise between these two poles. Even though God is transcendent over the ontological realms of nature and culture, which stand over and against each other, God can be occasionally summoned as an arbiter. In terms of the debate between Boyle and Hobbes, God must be kept from interfering in natural law or in the laws of the Republic. Thus, Boyle rids nature of any divine presence and Hobbes rids society of any divine origin. This parenthetical transcendent deity assisted the rise of a spiritualized and privatized religion, because the all-powerful and simultaneously immanent and transcendent God could descend into people's hearts without interfering in their external affairs, in their accounts of nature, or in their understandings of society. As Latour comments, "By playing three times in a row on the same alternation of transcendence and immanence, the moderns can mobilize Nature, objectify the social and feel the spiritual presence of God, even while firmly maintaining that Nature escapes us, that Society is our own work, and that God no longer intervenes. Who could resist such a constitution?"[17] The belief that it is possible to account for and to criticize the ascendancy of society or science outside theology does indeed result in the spiritual vacuum to which Marangudakis refers: God is absent from nature and culture.

Re-Configuring Nature and Culture: Haraway's Cyborg Feminism

Despite the current difficulty in distinguishing between the natural and the cultural, much ecological debate continues to assume the priority of one pole over the other. Marangudakis refers to Ecofeminism and its attention to "natural" similarities between women and nature, and their common fate under "male domination." According to him: "Ecofeminism argues that women's biological makeup associates them directly with nature's domains of birth and nurture, *vis-à-vis* the masculine instincts of death and competition."[18] Thus, Ecofeminism attempts to prioritize the natural rather than the cultural. Through a detailed assessment of the narration of nature by a science dominated by patriarchal assumptions and practices, Haraway rejects the notions of Ecofeminism as, paradoxically, the very means of the oppression of women. She perceives this "nature" (to which Ecofeminists and the Green movement wish to return in a wave of nostalgia) as all too modern and reliant on the dualism of nature and culture. She examines experiments and scientific observations of primates in the 1920s and 1930s as an example of how the narrated concepts of nature can be translated back into human culture as a justification for male dominance. In particular, she focuses on the work of Robert M. Yerkes and Clarence Ray Carpenter of the Laboratories of Comparative Psychobiology at Yale University.[19]

Yerkes was interested in the intelligence and social-sexual behavior of apes,

17. Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
18. Marangudakis, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
19. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Press, 1991), p. 13.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where the former was seen as a "natural" index of merit by experimental comparative psychologists, and this was understood to rule the lower functions of the mind and thus create a rational society.[20] The relation between this intelligence and the social-sexual activity of the apes was a major focus of Yerkes' research. In a study designed to investigate the origins of the body politic, published in 1939, he observed that female chimpanzees who were receptive to the sexual advances of males were permitted food and "privileges" normally withheld by the dominant males. The experiment purportedly demonstrated how primate intelligence could begin to form the concepts of social right and privilege through social-sexual behavior.

Haraway discusses in more detail another study of 400 rhesus monkeys conducted by Carpenter in the late 1930s. These monkeys, which had been collected from Asia, were released on the island of Cayo Santiago, and a period of social chaos ensued. Over time, the monkeys organized themselves into six groups of widely ranging sizes. In examining Carpenter's conclusions, Haraway notes the same kind of sexual reductionism seen in Yerkes' work: Carpenter claimed that the dominance of males between groups was strongly correlated with sexual behavior and therefore with evolutionary advantage. However, one experiment in particular points to the way in which the scientific mediation of the natural can be the means of sustaining a patriarchal politics. Having conducted observations of an undisturbed group for one week, Carpenter removed the animal judged to be most dominant in priority access to, e.g., food and sex. This animal was known as the "alpha male." There followed a further week of observation until the second male was removed. After a third week of observation, the third male was removed. Finally, one week later, all three males were returned to the group. Changes in social behavior were observed throughout. Following the removal of the dominant males, the group of monkeys experienced considerable disruption and an increase in conflict with other groups. When the dominant males were returned, the group regained its previously high status among the various groups of monkeys on the island.

Haraway questions the assumptions of these experiments. For example, what political assumptions undergird the removal of "alpha males" and the descriptions of females as 'prostituting' themselves in order to gain food and "favor"? In discussing the interpretations of Carpenter's results, Haraway comments that 'The group that loses its alpha male loses in the competitive struggle with other organized organic societies. The result would be reflected in less food, higher infant mortality, fewer offspring, and thus evolutionary disadvantage or even extinction."[21] Thus, the retention of "alpha males" is perceived to be crucial to primitive or basic organized society. For Haraway, these experiments are indicative of the

20. Haraway notes that in WWI Yerkes designed the intelligence test for the army to determine promotion and command. See Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

21. *Ibid.*, p.18.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way in which scientific endeavor, which has been largely male-dominated throughout its short history, has sought to peel away the layers of evolution in order to take a clearer look at nature without the distortions of culture. She argues: "We have allowed the theory of the body politic to be split in such a way that natural knowledge is reincorporated covertly into techniques of social control instead of being transformed into sciences of liberation."[22] The activities of these primates apparently represent a "purer" and therefore more natural society, which can provide the means of identifying a properly "natural" society. "Since animal societies are seen to have in simpler form all the characteristics of human societies and cultures, one may legitimately learn from them the base of supposedly natural, integrated community for humanity."[23] However, it is clear for Haraway that science frequently interprets its observations in terms of established cultural practices and assumptions — practices which have frequently revolved around male dominance. "These sciences will have liberating functions in so far as we build them on social relations not based on domination. A corollary of that requirement is the rejection of all forms of the ideological claims for pure objectivity rooted in the subject-object split that has legitimated our logics of domination of nature and ourselves."[24]

Haraway therefore rejects any return to a scientifically mediated "nature" as a solution to the collapse in the division of nature and culture and the ensuing confusion concerning possible remedies for the environmental crisis. Such "nature" is all too modern and patriarchal in its origins. Nature should not be identified in simple opposition to another ontological category. Instead, she contends that humanity should resolve itself to an existence which participates simultaneously in the two categories in contradistinction to which it has traditionally been identified: the natural and the technological or artificial. However, Haraway wishes to resist the patriarchal and modern fetish of defining and patrolling boundaries, which are so evidently in constant flux. She sees humanity as living in an increasingly technological world in the form of a cyborg existence. Haraway comments that "the cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics."[25]

Whether we are submerged in the seductive play of virtual reality, consuming vast swathes of information on the internet, plugged into machines in the hospital or simply communicating by telephone or e-mail, today's existence is cybernetic. Although humanity has lived alongside the technological for hundreds of years, the boundary between human and machine, the natural and the artificial is increasingly difficult to locate. Machines are now described as self-moving, self-designing and autonomous. No longer can one simply speak of the Cartesian "ghost in the machine": now there are intelligent machines, computers which have viruses, and the possibility of computer consciousness. Although these terms are often metaphorical when applied to technology, their use does

22. *Ibid.*, p.8.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imply a blurring of the boundary between human and machine. In addition, not only is technology described in terms previously used exclusively of the natural and the organic, the human organism is frequently described in terms of a mechanical-technical biology. For example, Daniel Dennett claims that human consciousness is the result of an essentially mechanical and chemical process within the brain: 'The phenomena of human consciousness have been explained . . . in terms of the operations of a 'virtual machine,' a sort of evolved (and evolving) computer program that shapes the activities of the brain."[26]

Haraway argues for a turn to this technology in the form of a cyborg existence, because "cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves."[27] An increased cyborg existence is indicative of the collapse of nature and culture, because "natural" human bodies exist now within a technological realm that has commonly been understood as cultural or artificial. However, for Haraway this new culture will not require the natural as its merely occasional foundation. Just as a cyborg existence is indicative of a blurring of the dualism of the natural and the cultural or artificial, so too the cyborg might also rewrite other distinctions, e.g., public and private, male and female, creator and created, truth and illusion, active and passive, God and man. For Haraway, these dualisms "have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals. . . ."[28] The cyborg destroys these dualisms through a reconfiguration of bodies and activities. In the cyborg world, it is no longer clear what constitutes a "body" or a "mind," the "male" or "female," the "virtual" or the "real," the "natural" or the "cultural." These categories are renegotiated in a new hybrid existence of the natural and the artificial. It may be asked whether Haraway is advocating a turn to a technology which exhibits the same patriarchal origins as the scientifically mediated nature that must apparently be left behind. Although she does recognize that "cyborgs are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism," she claims that "illegitimate offspring are exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential."[29]

Despite Haraway's confidence that a turn to cyborg imagery might bring about a rewriting of various dualisms of which the division of nature and culture is just one, there is one crucial fact concerning technology and machines which casts doubt on the possibility of this enterprise. Machines and technology merely mimic that which is found elsewhere. Virtual reality is obviously mimetic, but so too is the writing of a computer, the image of an ultrasound scan, or the workings

26. See Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 431. Note the persistent dualism between the "program" and the "brain" in Dennett's "explanation" of consciousness.
27. Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a dialysis machine. These are theatrical representations of what is already present. Of course, for Haraway, the cyborg ensures the impossibility of distinguishing between the original and the copy, for even this dualism has collapsed. However, because the cyborg merely imitates that which is already present, it cannot fully envision a reconfiguration of nature and culture following the division's collapse. Technology, in and of itself, and a simple resort to a cyborg existence can only mimic the division of nature and culture or the collapse of that division. The cyborg is, after all, bound to its origins through mimesis.

Because technology is merely mimetic in character, it must become the tool of a creative imagination capable of forming a new understanding of nature and culture. This fact pervades Haraway's book. Yet, the imagination which is to govern the use of technology in her cyborg world appears to be that of liberal ethics. She writes: "Throughout these diverse contents, this book treats constructions of nature as a crucial cultural process for people who need and hope to live in a world less riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender and sexuality."[30] However, the origins of the ethics which can denounce the dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender and sexuality are by no means clear-cut. Moreover, these categories presuppose the very dualisms Haraway wishes to destroy. Thus, race describes the dualism of white and non-white, class, that of upper and lower, gender, male and female, sexuality, that of heterosexual and homosexual. Yet, once these dualisms are banished within a cyborg existence, what is the nature of the imagination which governs the new technology? Any ethical imagination must survive the re-writing of nature, culture, and the body in the cyborg world in order to envision a future after the dualisms of modernity. This requires an ethics which transcends this transition,Yet, Haraway's ethics may be defined, albeit negatively, by means of the very modernity she wishes to destroy.

Despite the lack of a substantial ethics to direct the new cyborg world, Haraway maintains an optimistic attitude concerning relation to technology: ". . . the machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped and dominated. The machine is us, out processes, an aspect of our embodiment" which cannot therefore "dominate or threaten us."[31] Society, however, does feel threatened by technology. While technology provides the possibility of greater economic production, more food, faster travel, better communications, or dramatic developments in health care, there is also the lack of an ethical imagination to govern and to direct such developments. The technological can also represent the threat of, e.g., mass fraud, overconsumption, the temptation to transcend the temporal human condition, the transmission of dangerous information, or the possibility of chaos due to the failure of machines to read dates correctly. The current confused debates in Britain over genetic engineering and cloning are indicative both of the collapse of the division between nature and culture, and of the resultant ethical vacuum at the heart of a society

30. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

threatened by such technology. Yet, even on Haraway's own terms, the statement that the cyborg is "us," is meaningless, because there is no notion of an "us" that transcends the collapse into a hybrid existence, be it a hybrid of nature and culture or human and machine. For such a claim to be meaningful, it requires some notion of a perpetual personal identity. As there is no transcendent ethics in Haraway's world to govern the use of technology and to provide a vision for a reconfiguration of nature and culture, there is also no transcendent "us" to provide the subjects of the future. Such a use of technology becomes ungoverned and rampant, because it is subject to a nihilistic ethics with no notion of the self.

Despite Haraway's reluctance to maintain any transcendence in the cyborg manifesto, echoes of the incoherence of the modern constitution do remain. Just as nature, culture, and God were simultaneously transcendent and immanent in the debate between Boyle and Hobbes, so the liberal ethical imagination is simultaneously transcendent and immanent for Haraway. To avoid recourse to patriarchal dominance, it must be transcendent in its survival of the collapse into a hybrid existence and in the provision of an ethics governing the use of technology for the destruction of modernity's dualisms, while also being immanent in a world in which everything is negotiated and constructed. Yet, this liberal ethics performs a role similar to that of the divine in the debate between the experimental scientist and the political philosopher. Such an ethics is kept in reserve for times of conflict.

Both this discussion of Haraway's cyborg manifesto and Marangudakis' comments hint at the need for some transcendent or objective source of a new ethics and politics. Latour has pointed to the difficulty of identifying either the natural or the cultural pole for a solution to the problems of ecology. Haraway has indicated the patriarchal origins of the nature to which Ecofeminism seeks to return. Yet her own world of hybrids repeats the errors of modernity in its simultaneous play on transcendence and immanence. Such a cyborg world also relies on a mimetic technology, which can only repeat the division of nature and culture or the division's collapse. Attempts to find solutions to ecological problems or to the collapse of the fundamental categories through which nature has been understood already hint at the theological character of this problem in the continuous search for transcendence.

Theological Origins of the Nature/Culture Division: The Bracketed God

Within pre-modern theology, nature and culture were not understood in contradistinction to one another, for these were not separate or distinct ontological realms. They attained a commonality in being created, i.e, in partaking of *esse commune*. Instead of the modern "formal" distinction between nature and culture, or more fundamentally, between object and subject, a "real" distinction was drawn between the creator and the creation.[32] Thomas Aquinas expressed

32. On the "formal distinction" in Scotus, as opposed to Thomist categories of "real" and "intellectual distinction," see Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 123ff.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their relation in terms of what was later labelled "the analogy of being." He maintained that "God exists in everything by power inasmuch as everything is subject to his power, by presence inasmuch as everything is naked and open to his gaze, and by substance inasmuch as he exists in everything causing their existence. . . ."[33] The created realm, including all of nature and culture, participates in, or, in some mysterious way, borrows from divine being. Yet, for Aquinas, God is fundamentally other than his creation, for in contingent creation, essence and existence are radically separated: what a creature is, its essence, is utterly separate from the fact of its existence. There is a hierarchy of beings: the more real a creature, the more fully its essence implies its existence. Only in God do essence and existence coincide, and his existence is therefore what He is: the divine is *ipsum esse subsistens*.[34] This is not to say that existence is a property possessed by God in a fuller, more replete or "bigger" sense than in creation. God is simple and necessary. He is "Being itself" and therefore the source of all being. This ontological difference permits the participation of creation in God himself. Therefore, there is no analogy of proper proportionality between God and creation, for God is wholly other and yet the source of all there is. Properly speaking, this is not a dualist construal of the relation of the finite and the infinite, because the two do not stand separated from each other in any extended fashion: creation cannot be understood outside God, nor is God knowable (other than to Himself) in a fashion devoid of created mediation. The creation participates in the creator and continually receives its being as gift. Moreover, this participation and reception allows creation substantive speech about God by means of analogical predication. Thus, Aquinas operates with a linguistic analogy not of proportion but of attribution, whereby perfection terms are predicated primarily of God and secondarily of creatures. Thus, to say that a person is good is only to say that that person participates in goodness, which is primarily an attribute of God. According to John Milbank, for Aquinas, "to know God as cause is not just to know him as the cause of the Good, but also to propose him as the perfection of goodness, and in a sense as the exact, perfect reality of one's own, human being."[35] This analogy of attribution is possible, because of a doctrine of creation based on the analogy of being, namely the participation of creation in God.[36]

Later mediaeval theologians believed that this analogy of being posited a

33. St.Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964 edn.), tr. by Timothy McDermott, 1a., question 8, article 3.

34. On divine simplicity see Aquinas, *op. cit.*, 1a. question 3. See also an earlier short treatise, *De Ente et Essentia*, tr. by Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949).

35. John Milbank, "A Critique of the Theology of Right" in *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 15.

36. For a discussion of analogy, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *op. cit.*, 1a. question 13.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remote and unknowable God. This lead Scotus to propose what was to become known as the univocity of being. Aquinas claimed that God does not possess existence or being as a property. Scotus took the opposing view and maintained that both God and creation share in "Being," which is an independent third term: "For all genera, species, individuals, and the essential parts of genera, and the Uncreated Being all include 'being' quidditatively."[37] Because the creator and the creation now share something in common, i.e, indifferent Being, this might draw the two poles together. Rather than work through revelation from God to creatures, it might now be possible to work up to knowledge of God by a perpetual and rational magnification of Being. However, as Pickstock has argued, the Scotist univocity of being made the divine utterly remote: "Scotist univocity unmediably separates the creation from God, precisely because the infinity of the distance can be the object of no concept other than Being, the most formal of all essences, independent of all further determinations. One cannot peer through such an interminable quantity of sameness, for God's infinite intensity of Being exceeds every measure."[38]

Scotus replaced the Thomist analogy of being with an analogy of proportion, which demands a measure of the difference between creator and creation. Yet, such a measure drives an infinite and therefore unimaginable distance between the two. Whereas Aquinas claimed that the relation between creator and creation was one of participation, in which the whole of nature and culture were enthused with the divine, and pointed beyond themselves to their uncreated source, the Scotist univocity made the bracketing of God thinkable, maybe even inevitable. As the divine was now unimaginably remote, nature and culture could be understood without recourse to any metaphysical category other than an indifferent Being. Moreover, in the midst of countless attempts to bridge the Scotist abyss, and in the face of a theology which could no longer posit a fundamental ontological difference between creator and creation, the divine was inevitably brought to submit to increasingly anthropomorphic categories. Thus, nature was no longer understood as ontologically different and yet proximal to God, and culture was no longer understood as teleologically orientated toward its true form in the divine polis. Instead, natural categories became the indicators of the divine nature in the guise of natural theology, and thus nature (in order to be positively definitive of God rather than God being definitive of nature) had to be defined in distinction not to God, but to human culture. Thus, traces of both the origins of the modern division of nature and culture, and the requirement of the modern constitution that God be bracketed can be found in a 13th century theological maneuver. God was banished to the margins, only to traverse the abyss of Being in a privatized spirituality or as the

37. John Duns Scotus, "Opus oxoniense" in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and tr. by Allan Wolter (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1962 edn.), I, dist. 3, q. 3.

38. Pickstock, *op. cit.*, p. 122-123.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

occasional arbiter in disputes between the natural and the cultural.[39]

It is easy to see how this proportionality between finite and infinite initiated the fundamental dualism of subject and object which lies beneath that of nature and culture. An analogy of proportion in which Being is the measure tends to posit a precise and fixed relation of God to creation. God becomes the efficient cause of creation, just as human beings are the efficient causes of their creations. As Milbank comments: "God is only related to creation as efficient cause conceived univocally as like finite efficient causes, and so ontically rather than ontologically. God 'constructs' the world outside himself as an artisan manufactures a clock."[40] This renders nature describable as an object, just as human creations are objects independent of their creating subjects. Such created objects are distinguished from the subject, who is their efficient cause, whether that subject be the divine or human artisan. The divine and human creators differ only in their intensity of Being and therefore only in the magnitude of their creations. The realm of subjects and objects, with occasional intervention from the divine, has displaced that of God and creation. Meanwhile, metaphysics becomes a pre-theological discourse concerning an indifferent and arbitrary Being. The foundations of the division of nature and culture as the realms of, respectively, subjects and objects, are laid.

This theological transition from an understanding of nature and culture as fundamentally creatures of God who participate in divine being to an understanding of nature and culture as a series of subjects and objects on which the divine will is occasionally exerted points toward the basis of the assumption that ecological discourse is possible without recourse to anything theological. Because God becomes paradoxically remote under the sway of the univocity of Being, divine involvement in the created order becomes arbitrary and incidental. Rather than creation perpetually receiving its being from the divine in the form of gift, creation is now the effect of merely efficient causality. Whereas, for Aquinas, creation *ex nihilo* involved an intricate and unfathomable weaving of formal, final and efficient causality which could thereby indicate the origin, form, and telos of creation, the latter was now understood merely as a fabrication with no reference to a purpose in God. For Aquinas, creation was perpetually the recipient of its

---

39. In *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), particularly chapter 1, John Milbank argues that the rise of late medieval nominalism issues in a voluntaristic theology of power. The abandonment of participation in Being and Unity in favor of a "covenantal bond" between God and men gives rise not only to contractual human relations, but also to a doctrine of a God whose will is occasionally imposed only in order to enforce contracts. Milbank also argues that God becomes just one more unity among others, rather than the unity of all things, including nature and culture: "No longer is the world participatorily unfolded within the divine expressive logos, but instead a bare divine unity starkly confronts the other distinct unities which he has ordained" (p. 14). Divine will and unity become incidental to nature and culture.

40. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, *op. cit.*, p. 9 (italic added).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

being from God, participation in the divine was the final cause of creation, and God was the formal cause of a creation made in His image and likeness. For post-Scotist and especially Franciscan theologians, however, divine creation was more akin to human creativity writ large, in which a created object can possess a formal and final cause independent of its creator. Therefore, if nature and culture are now the effects of only efficient causality, they can assume a form and purpose independent of their divine creator. Nature and culture, which are objects of the divine creative subject, assume pure immanence, because their purpose or telos is apparently understandable without recourse to any transcendent.

Conclusion: Nature, Culture or Theology?

Two of the options Marangudakis presents at the conclusion of his essay are increasingly difficult to identify. The tendency within ecology of both Left and Right to objectify and ground an ethics of environmental concern in either nature or culture is clear, and yet the division of these two realms seems to be collapsing. Ecofeminists, Deep ecologists or the Green movement wish to return to a nature which is increasingly obscure. Meanwhile, Haraway argues that, when such a nature can be identified, it is all too modern and narrated by a patriarchal science. Therefore, Haraway demands ever more human culture in the form of a technological cyborg world, which can re-write the oppressive dualisms of modernity. Yet, such technology, in being mimetic, can only repeat the division of nature and culture or the division's collapse. In addition, Haraway betrays a need, shared with more traditional ecologists, i.e., the requirement of a transcendent ethical imagination. Some ecologists attempt to ground such an ethics within nature, while Haraway resorts to a liberalism, which is itself modern and defined by the dualisms she wishes to banish.

This attempt to divide nature and culture has a theological background. It is based on a more fundamental division of subject and object, which became thinkable only following the late mediaeval theological shift in the doctrine of creation. This move away from a traditional understanding of nature and culture robbed these created realms of a telos or final cause which transcends them. Any ethics based in nature and culture was now bound to appear immanent and arbitrary. This crucial question shouts through the work of ecologists as diverse as Donna Haraway and Arne Naess: what is the purpose of nature and culture? In a sense, theology is passed over in the debate over nature and culture because, in a Scotist world in which efficient causality is the only concern, theology apparently talks only of a long-forgotten, divine fabrication, which has little to do with present problems. In such discourse, any attribution of a transcendent telos becomes a violent intrusion. However, a more traditional theological understanding of nature and culture will view them simultaneously in terms of their origin, form, and telos. Thus, an ethics of nature and culture no longer appears as an afterthought, but as a fundamental part of a whole understanding of creation. It is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

therefore possible that the solution to an ecological problem which revolves around the problematic division of nature and culture should not be sought in the immanent, since this only repeats the problem. Rather, a theological understanding of nature and culture may present an ethics which emerges from beyond these categories by viewing them as creatures, not as mere objects and subjects. Is this a merely nostalgic return to redundant mediaeval categories? Not necessarily, because the ecological debate itself has unwittingly identified the need of transcendence as crucial to the amelioration of the planet's environmental difficulties. This is, therefore, a theological problem. What is required is the refusal to view theology in Scotist terms, as concerned with a single creative act, after which further theological speech is at least as arbitrary and violent as any other ecology and is equally based on the division of nature and culture, subject and object. A more orthodox theology presents the possibility of the full and rich picture of nature and culture, their origin, form, and telos, as creatures who participate in a reality beyond themselves.

From "The Clash of Civilizations" to "Civilizational Parallelism"

Kaveh L. Afrasiabi

Introduction

Talking about civilization is like talking about God. While the aim is to gain knowledge, often the result is only greater obscurity. What is at issue may not be really a concept, but nothing at all. Yet, concepts have their own history, and the UN's inauguration of 2001 as the year of the "dialogue of civilizations," not to mention recent ethno-religious conflicts, has generated new interest in "civilizational" questions — despite the fact that this runs counter to the postmodern aversion to traditional historiography, in favor of "micro-histories,"[1] and objections to

1. George Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH: U. of New Hampshire Press, 1997).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the term "civilization" on the ground that it cannot be defined precisely enough.[2]

Most analyses of civilization are vulnerable to charges of technological reductionism (Mumford, Needham), apophatic empiricism (Toynbee), culturalism (Ricoeur), and the reification of non-Western civilizations and political biases (Hegel). Said has exposed the Eurocentrism of most Western accounts of the Orient. What has remained unexamined, however, is how various distortions of Orientalist (and counter-Orientalist) accounts can be better understood from the viewpoint of competing civilizations[3] and of the spatio-temporal location of their proponents.[4] As such, the much lamented difficulty of the West in approaching Islam objectively appears both logical and even rational.[5]

The renewal of interest in "civilizations" is inhibited by the explosion of literature on globalization which, by and large, depicts a process of de-differentiation and increased integration culminating in a world civilization. Historically, this literature has been preceded by modernization literature, often heralding a Western-sponsored universal "Westernization." In both cases, the world's *telos* of cohering

---

2. Hans J. Morgenthau dismissed "civilization" on the ground that it is not susceptible to empirical verification. See M. F. Ashley Montagu, ed., *Toynbee and History: Critical Essays and Reviews* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1956), p. 96. Toynbee argued the opposite, i.e., that civilizations, like epochs, are conceptual wholes corresponding to empirical entities. See Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 231-33. Thus, he has focused on the "challenge and response" of civilizations, both past and present. From Toynbee's viewpoint, history appears as the march of competing civilizations, which are somehow distinguished from "barbarism." See also Paul Ricoeur, *Truth and History* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 87. Unlike Ricoeur, Mumford and Needham opt for a more technological definition: "The regularization of time, the increase in mechanical power, the multiplication of goods, the contraction of time and space, the standardization of performance and product, the transfer of skill to automata, and the increase of collective interdependence — these, then, are the chief characteristics of our machine civilization. They are the basis of the particular forms of life and modes of expression that distinguish Western Civilization, at least in degree, from the various earlier civilizations that preceded it." See Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, 1934), p. 281; and Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Seven Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

3. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Said overstates his case and neglects to consider that historians such as Toynbee anticipated his criticisms of bias of Western scholarship on Islam: "The prevalent depreciation of Islam in the West is a relic of the anti-Islamic Christian prejudice. This stubbornly survives even in modern Western minds that feel an obligation, in their intellectual work, to correct the Christian bias in their cultural heritage, and that imagine themselves in their unfavorable appraisal of Islam, to be acting up to their own high standard of detachment and to be condemning Islam objectively, on its own merits." *A Study of History*, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

4. See Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (Stoney Brooks, New York: N. Hays, 1978), p. 114.

5. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); and *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh University Press, 1985), p. 162.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into one macro (syncretic or Western) civilization forms a dominant tendency, with one group hailing the outcome, i.e., a "global village," as the institutionalization of reason, and another bemoaning it as the triumph of neo-colonialism.[6] This post-Cold War world order's embroilment in a complex web of civilizational frictions and hostilities has been aptly theorized by Samuel Huntington.

The "Clash of Civilizations" Thesis Revisited

Huntington's writings on the "clash of civilizations"[7] has generated a great deal of interest in the West and even more in the East among the Third World intelligentsia, some of whom have viewed it as yet another exercise in monological "Orientalism."[8] Yet, the idea of a "clash of civilizations" does not necessarily preclude dialogue. "Clash of civilizations" and "dialogue of civilizations" are not contradictory. The stereotypical romantic view that "dialogue" inherently promotes intercultural understanding is dismissed by Huntington's tracing of "clash of civilizations" to the rapid increase in global communication heightening local cultures' awareness of their differences and implicating them in "civilizational" consciousness, solidarity and, eventually, rival projects.[9] While calling attention to difficulties in securing meaningful consensus through interaction among "civilizational" constellations, Huntington's view carries the burden of showing that increased civilizational interaction involves neither shared understanding nor interest in reconciliation. This is born in large measure by a blunt portrayal of global hierarchies featuring Western civilization's unprecedented concentration of power and the concomitant reification of "global harmony," whereby the "world community" has become a smokescreen for the "global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the United States and other Western powers," which manipulate international institutions to protect their hegemonic interests.[10]

---

6. See Kiyoshi Shimizu, "The Dialectics of Globalization: Whose Globalization Is It Anyway?" *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 40 (Oct. 1996), pp. 266-272.

7. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Summer 1993).

8. E.g., Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Clash of Civilization Thesis," *Harvard Middle East and Islamic Review,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 1-27. See also Fred Dallmayr, *Alternative Visions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), Chapter 12.

9. See Reuel Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963); Jamie Phelps, *More Light, Less Heat: How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth* (San Francisco: Joseph-Bass Books, 1999); Jerald D. Gort *et al*, *Dialogue and Syncretism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991); Donald K. Swearer, *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977). Swearer distinguishes between dialogue carried out within a philosophical framework to which language of faith is referred and the dialogue aimed at comparing religions' symbolic systems.

10. Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," *op. cit.*, p. 39-40. Huntington has a static view of culture as "a series of processes that construct, reconstruct, and dismantle cultural materials. . . . The concepts of a fixed, stationary and bounded culture must give way to a sense of the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets." Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Huntington comes dangerously close to endorsing ossified Third Worldist caricatures of the UN and other international institutions as mere pawns of the West. These views undervalue the facts that Third World nations have been successful in influencing the transnational institutions, in which they have participated and that the UN and other similar institutions such as the World Trade Organization, provide important forums for strategic, diplomatic, and economic dialogue among nations.[11] Absent in Huntington is any discussion of how the complex interdependence of nations,[12] as well as consensus-generating coordinating mechanisms such as the UN,[13] can buffer clashing civilizations. Huntington's theory must demonstrate that intra-civilizational communication is tied to strategic, i.e., success-oriented interests. In his intermeshing of economic and cultural explanations for a coming "clash of civilizations," Huntington retains a purely utilitarian notion of interest. His diagnosis of a growing, culture-based fragmentation supplanting the ideological cleavages readily extrapolates a concretization of cultural cleavages into programmatic action termed civilizational. But where is the evidence for the congealment of, say, Latino culture threatening the West? Has not the Latin "other" become so familiar as to look like the "same"? In what sense, then, is there a distinct Latin civilization or, for that matter, an Islamic one?

There are reasons to question Huntington's response that his civilizations are "meaningful entities" and that religious discord is the linchpin of clashing civilizations.[14] Thus, Sowell has argued that "often religious labels distinguish groups whose real differences are ethnic or cultural." His discussion of "cultural diffusion" leads him to postulate "the emergence of the elements of a common world culture."[15] This is related to a whole set of questions[16] that besiege the "civilization"

11. See Stephen D. Krasner, *Structural Conflict: The Third World Against Global Liberalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); also, Afrasiabi, "Iran and the World Trade Organization," *The Middle East Executive Report* (December 1995).

12. See Robert S. Keohane and Joseph Nye, Jr., *eds., Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977).

13. James N. Rosenau, ed., *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

14. "Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion." "Clash of Civilizations," *op. cit.*, p. 24. From a Huntingtonian perspective, one may ask if Israel, notwithstanding its distinct history, religious melange, etc., represents a new civilization.

15. Thomas Sowell, *Conquests and Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), p. 478.

16. Against Huntington, here one can use Toynbee's observation that the Andean civilization has been subsumed by the West, and that Iran has a distinct civilization not subsumable under the Islamic rubric. See Toynbee, *A Study of History, op. cit.*, p. 169: "The Islamic civilizations in the Iranic and Arabic worlds are therefore two more separate civilizations, on a par with the two Christian civilizations of Byzantium and the West." See also Kaveh Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy* (Boulders, CO: Westview, 1994); and Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians* (New York: Plume, 1995). Mackey, however, exaggerates the congruence of Iran's pre-Islamic and Islamic heritages, and reduces their tensions to "a perpetual tension between the transcendental and the mundane." *Ibid.*, p. 378.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enterprise: How are the various elements, culture, language, religion, etc. organized in the "historical ensembles" called civilizations? Should religious processes be privileged in studying today's civilizations?

A related problem is Huntington's conceptualization of the West as bereft of any meaningful Islamic presence.[17] Clinging to a homogenous notion of "the West," Huntington prefigures a highly unlikely "de-Westernization"[18] of the US due to the on-going influx of Hispanic and other minorities, raising the specter of an "internal clash of civilizations." Similarly, his warning about a "coming clash of civilizations" coincides with the immediate aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the rise of several new nations grappling with the issues of identity-formation. As Aron noted, "Any contact of societies or civilizations leads first to the shock of contradictory manifestations, from which mutual lack of understanding comes."[19] If so, could Huntington have mistaken the initial shock of post-Cold War transition, marked with the development of new nationalisms, for a stubborn longitudinal pattern? Where is the scientific basis for Huntington's claim of historical clairvoyance regarding the future destiny of world society? What Huntington perceives as an endemic, long-term form of global conflict may be little more than a transitional phenomenon signalling the arrival of civilizational harmony instead of clash and conflict — not unlike the history of the Western civilization itself where "the bleakest chapters of Christian fratricidal history recounts the struggles between Catholics and Protestants."[20]

---

17. He subdivides Islamic civilization into "Arabic, Turkic and Malay." This leaves out both Iran and Indonesia and ignores that, given the immense presence in medieval and modern Europe of Islamic culture, it is misleading to speak of Western culture as non-Islamic, i.e., Islam's "hostile other." See Jon Alexander and Giles Dimock, eds., *Religion in Western Civilization* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1987); and Jan Kinney, *Islam as Other* (Chicago: Institute of Islamic Information and Education, 1980).

18. Samuel P. Huntington, "If not Civilizations, What?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (Nov-Dec. 1993), p. 190. While Huntington's "internal clash of civilizations" makes no sense for the US, it fits well contemporary Iran, harboring both pre-Islamic and Islamic heritages, while official ideology is purely Islamic and vehemently opposed to pre-Islamic popular culture. A genuine, internal dialogue of civilizations in that country, then, may undermine the government's legitimacy, insofar as it has hitherto been unable to deal with the Persian heritage. A clue to the government's culture war emerged during a recent New Year celebration attracting thousands of Iranians to the ruins of Persopolis. The government cancelled the celebrations, following the leader's denouncement of the ruins as having "no spiritual significance" and containing "vestiges of the deposed monarchy." Reported by Associated Press (New York, March 22, 1999).

19. Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 72.

20. Paul M. Minus, Jr., *The Catholic Rediscovery of Protestantism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 11. Minus writes that as a result of increased encounter, "Protestants not only saw Catholics in a new light but also enabled Catholics to view them in a like manner." *Ibid.*, p. 111. As Moltmann and Küng have pointed out, Huntington ignores the paradoxical state of intra-civilizational relations. See Jürgen Moltmann and Hans Küng, *Islam — A Challenge to Christianity* (Rome: Concilium: 1994) p. vii.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Alternative: "Civilizational Parallelism"

The advantage of talking about "civilizational parallelism" rather than "the clash of civilizations" is that it does not superimpose any telos on the historical process. Instead, it is open-ended and limits itself to the delineation of the limits and nuances of parallel civilizations, such as the various ramifications of unprecedented intra-cultural exposure in today's internetted world. Nor does it jump to the conclusion, as Huntington seemingly does, of identifying every difference as a mark of separation. Another advantage is that "civilizational parallelism" allows for discontinuity, disjunction and lack of fit *vis-à-vis* the cultural patterns of interaction among the world's civilizations. Such an insight is a prerequisite for understanding how, e.g., Hindu civilization, despite its largely Westernized polity and its position in the North-South nexus, does not present a conflictual challenge to Western civilization, and how its distinct cultural identity does not implicate the continent's population in a revolt against the West.[21]

Huntington's bold sub-thesis of "the West versus the rest" leaves only recourse to stratagems, dislocating the dictates of civilizations from the realm of free and circulating exchange of ideas to the level of power and antagonism. Thus, the theory ends up terminally embroiled in power politics. In addition, the "West versus the rest" thesis must prove that other civilizational conflicts, e.g., between the Slavic and Islamic peoples, are secondary, and that they still form a nexus against the West. Huntington's over-generalization regarding the strategic deployment of indigenous cultures in the service of civilizational conflict with other civilizations, principally the West, harbors an a priori assumption concerning these civilizations' cultural and political fit, thus foreclosing the scenario of a civilizational conflict with the West solely on the economic and power fronts or, vice versa, on the cultural or religious front.

The alternative notion of "civilizational parallelism" emphasizes the differential relationality of civilizations along their various dimensions. Guarding against any conflation of levels of analysis and premature foreclosure of questions that need to remain open, i.e., benign confrontation instead of warfare, this perspective even entertains the viability of a "clash of civilizations" as a possibility co-existing with other possibilities, including the permanent co-extensiveness and or gradual convergence of various civilizations through the economy, politics, culture, religion, and the like. According to Huntington, civilizations are differentiated from each other by religion and "people of different civilizations have different views on relations between God and man."[22] What is conspicuously absent here is any reference to the positive impact of interreligious interaction.

---

21. See Ram Swarup, *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1992); and K. Singh, "Inter-Faith Dialogue: A Hindu Perspective," in *Interfaith Dialogue and World Community*, ed. by Ch. G.SS. Sreenivasa Rao (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1991).

22. Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," *op. cit.*, p. 25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Inter-theological Dialogue and Religious Parallelism

In the past few decades, recurrent concern for a constructive dialogue among various religious perspectives has undergone inflation.[23] The various Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, and other creeds are found to be moving in parallel directions. Thus, the existence of unsuspected realms of shared theological grounds is acknowledged by Cobb, who advocates the idea of mutual creative transformation of religious faiths through internalizations beyond mere dialogue.[24] Recent literature on apocalypticism supports this view.[25]

Related studies of the concepts of God, salvation, free will and divine determination, etc. have found significant similarities among world religions.[26] This underscores the possibility of reaching consensus concerning religious truth — contrary to Vatican II's proclamation on interreligious faith, which limits interreligious dialogue to social ethics, without any possibility of theological reconciliation. The historical proclamation, still in effect, seeks to encourage dialogue, not to change the creeds, but in order to change the believers' attitudes toward other religions, to further global peace.[27] But who can deny that inter-religious dialogue is a theological question and that, consequently, theological dialogue is an inextricable part of the larger dialogue?[28] Can there ever be true religious harmony in the absence of an underlying theological harmony?[29]

The objective of dialogue is the recognition of the other's "otherness," inhibiting violence against apostacy, hereticism, etc. Genuine "interfaith dialogue"[30]

23. For a summary of the issue, see, Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

24. Thus, Cobb has shown that both Christianity and Mahyana Buddhism can transform one another, and apparent contradictions between them can turn into complementary contrasts. See John Cobb, "Being a Transformationist in a Pluralistic World," *Christian Century,* vol. 111, no. 23 (1994); and Gavin D'costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986). The problem with Cobb is that he de-emphasizes the clash-neutralizing parallelism of theologies and, instead, focuses only on transformism.

25. See *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum, 1998), Vol. 1, p. 80.

26. See, e.g., Abdoldjavad Falaturi, *et al. Three Ways to the One God: The Faith Experience in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Mark S. Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

27. *Dialogue & Proclamation, Pontifical Council For Interreligious Dialogue* (Rome: Vatican City, 1991).

28. This point bypasses William al-Sharif in his "Christianity and Islam: Towards a Civilizational Dialogue," in *The Bulletin,* vol. 15, no. 2 (January-June 1996), pp. 66-83.

29. According to Küng, "There can be no dialogue between religions without research into theological foundations." See Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 105.

30. See Martin Buber, "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace," in R. Anderson *et al.*, eds., *The Reach of Dialogue* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 1996), p. 87. See also David Bohn, "Transforming the Culture Through Dialogue," *Utne Reader* (Mar/Apr. 1991); Lawrence Terrfs, "Finding a Shared Meaning: Reflections on Dialogue," *Seeds of Unfolding*, Vol. V, No. XI (1994), pp. 4-10; Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* (New York: Orbis, 1985).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means reaching out to other faiths and establishing vital relations, to "make a valid place for the other religions within one's faith."[31] In this dialogue, the religious "other" becomes a real part of one's life. Perhaps it is not theology, but spirituality which provides the nucleus of interfaith learning.[32] Interfaith dialogue, however, has a conformist side, insofar as it has had the "authentic" identity-generating consequence of entrenching the participants in their particular perspective, e.g., the problem of religious fundamentalism. It carries the seeds of both fundamentalist "monologism" as well as a "dialogical imperative," i.e., "entering into relationships marked by openness, honesty, and the search for understanding."[33] What matters most about the similarity of certain theological frameworks is that it denotes the existence of common ground for a meaningful dialogue between their adherents. A positive affirmation of similarities does not require full agreement or the capitulation of one side to the other. A mutual recognition of theological differences through the acknowledgment of their similarities would then be the springboard for religious parallelism, benign competition, as well as reverence for the other side's beliefs.

---

31. Allan Diogenes, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern Word* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 188. According to the author, the themes of incarnation and salvation in Christianity and Hinduism contain vital differences and yet are concerned with the same question.

32. See, e.g., Tosh Arari and Wesley Ariarajah, eds., *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989). Emphasizing "plurality of spiritualities," these authors find a ready-made stream of connectedness in a spontaneous dialogue between the Christian monk, Islamic sufi and the Buddhist mystic. See also Seyed Hossain Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1970); Schuon Frithjof, *The Transcendental Unity of Religions* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1953).

33. David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative* (New York: Orbis, 1988), p. 85. Such a symbiotic relation is discernible in the works of the Muslim theosophist Suhrawardi and the Christian theologian Jürgen Moltmann, particularly with respect to their preoccupation with divine light, their shift from being to light, and their theologizing on God and His indwelling on Earth. See Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "Communicative Theory and Theology: A Reconsideration," *Harvard Theological Review* (January 1998).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*The French New Right in the Year 2000**

Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier

Introduction

The French New Right was born in 1968. It is not a political movement, but a think-tank and school of thought. For more than thirty years — in books and journals, colloquia and conferences, seminars and summer schools, etc. — it has attempted to formulate a metapolitical perspective.

Metapolitics is not politics by other means. It is neither a "strategy" to impose intellectual hegemony, nor an attempt to discredit other possible attitudes or agendas. It rests solely on the premise that ideas play a fundamental role in collective consciousness and, more generally, in human history. Through their works, Heraclitus, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx all triggered decisive revolutions, whose impact is still being felt today. History is a result of human will and action, but always within the framework of convictions, beliefs and representations which provide meaning and direction. The goal of the French New Right is to contribute to the renewal of these sociohistorical representations.

Even more now, this metapolitical impulse is based on a reflection about the evolution on Western societies in view of the coming 21st century. On the one hand, there is the growing impotence of political parties, unions, governments, classical forms of conquest and the exercise of political power, and, on the other, the rapid obsolescence of all antitheses (first and foremost, Left and Right) that have characterized modernity. Moreover, there is an unprecedented explosion of knowledge, which spreads with little regard for its consequences. In a world where closed entities have given way to interconnected networks with increasingly fuzzy reference points, metapolitical action attempts, beyond political divisions and through a new synthesis, to renew a transversal mode of thought and, ultimately, to study all areas of knowledge in order to propose a coherent worldview. Such has been the aim for over thirty years.

This manifesto summarizes all of this. The first part (Predicaments) provides a critical analysis of the present; the second part (Foundations) outlines a view concerning man and the world. Both are inspired by a multidisciplinary approach that challenges most of today's intellectual antitheses. Tribalism and globalism,

---

1. Originally published in *éléments* 94 (February 1999), pp. 11-23. Translated by Martin Bendelow and Francis Greene.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nationalism and internationalism, liberalism and Marxism, individualism and collectivism, progressivism and conservatism oppose each other with the same complacent logic of the excluded middle. For a century, these artificial oppositions have occluded what is most essential: the sheer size of a crisis that demands a radical renewal of modes of thought, decision and action. It is thus futile to seek this radical renewal in what has already been written. Yet, the French New Right has borrowed ideas from various theoretical sources. It has not hesitated to reappropriate what seems valuable in all currents of thought. This transverse approach has provoked the ire of the guardians of thought, concerned with freezing ideological orthodoxies in order to paralyze any new threatening synthesis.

From the very beginning, the French New Right has brought together people interested in participating in the development of a community. In France, as in other countries, it constitutes a community of work and reflection, whose members are not necessarily intellectuals, but all of whom are interested, in one way or another, in the battle of ideas. The third part of this manifesto (Outlooks) takes positions on current issues, debates and the future of peoples and civilization.

Predicaments

First and foremost, all critical thought attempts to put the age in which it develops in perspective. The present is a pivotal period — a turning point or an "*interregnum*," characterized by a major crisis: the end of modernity.

What is Modernity?

Modernity designates the political and philosophical movement of the last three centuries of Western history. It is characterized primarily by five converging processes: individualization, through the destruction of old forms of communal life; massification, through the adoption of standardized behavior and lifestyles; desacralization, through the displacement of the great religious narratives by a scientific interpretation of the world; rationalization, through the domination of instrumental reason, the free market, and technical efficiency; and universalization, through a planetary extension of a model of society postulated implicitly as the only rational possibility and thus as superior.

This movement has old roots. In most respects, it represents a secularization of ideas and perspectives borrowed from Christian metaphysics, which spread into secular life following a rejection of any transcendent dimension. Actually, one finds in Christianity the seeds of the great mutations that gave birth to the secular ideologies of the first post-revolutionary era. Individualism was already present in the notion of individual salvation and of an intimate and privileged relation between an individual and God that surpasses any relation on earth. Egalitarianism is rooted in the idea that redemption is equally available to all mankind, since all are endowed with an individual soul whose absolute value is shared by all humanity. Progressivism is born of the idea that history has an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

absolute beginning and a necessary end, and that it unfolds globally according to a divine plan. Finally, universalism is the natural expression of a religion that claims to manifest a revealed truth which, valid for all men, summons them to conversion. Modern political life itself is founded on secularized theological concepts. Reduced to an opinion among others, today Christianity has unwittingly become the victim of the movement it started. In the history of the West, it became the religion of the way out of religion.

The various concurrent and often contradictory philosophical schools of modernity agree on one issue: that there is a unique and universalizable solution for all social, moral and political problems. Humanity is understood to be the sum of rational individuals who, through self-interest, moral conviction, fellowship or even fear are called upon to realize their unity in history. In this perspective, the diversity of the world becomes an obstacle, and all that differentiates men is thought to be incidental or contingent, outmoded or even dangerous. To the extent that modernity is not only a body of ideas, but also a mode of action, it attempts by every available means to uproot individuals from their individual communities, to subject them to a universal mode of association. In practice, the most efficient means for doing this has been the marketplace.

The Crisis of Modernity.

The imagery of modernity is dominated by desires of freedom and equality. These two cardinal values have been betrayed. Cut off from the communities which protected them, giving meaning and form to their existence, individuals are now subject to such an immense mechanism of domination and decision that their freedom remains purely formal. They endure the global power of the marketplace, technoscience, or communications without ever being able to influence their course. The promise of equality has failed on two counts: communism has betrayed it by installing the most murderous totalitarian regimes in history; capitalism has trivialized it by legitimating the most odious social and economic inequalities in the name of equality. Modernity proclaims rights without in any way providing the means to exercise them. It exacerbates all needs and continually creates new ones, while reserving access to them to a small minority, which feeds the frustration and anger of all others. As for the ideology of progress, which responds to human expectations by nourishing the promise of an ever improving world, it is in a deep crisis. The future appears unpredictable, no longer offering hope, and terrifying almost everyone. Each generation confronts a world different from the one its fathers knew. Combined with accelerated transformations of life-styles and living contexts (*nomoi*), this enduring newness predicated on discrediting the fathers and old experiences, produces not happiness but misery.

The "end of ideologies" is an expression designating the historical exhaustion of the great mobilizing narratives that became embodied in liberalism, socialism, communism, nationalism, fascism, and, finally, Nazism. The 20th century has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sounded the death knell for most of these doctrines, whose concrete results were genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass murder, total wars among nations and permanent rivalry among individuals, ecological disasters, social chaos, and the loss of all significant reference points. The destruction of the lifeworld for the benefit of instrumental reason, (economic) growth, and material development have resulted in an unprecedented impoverishment of the spirit, and the generalization of anxiety related to living in an always uncertain present, in a world deprived both of the past and the future. Thus, modernity has given birth to the most empty civilization mankind has ever known: the language of advertising has become the paradigm of all social discourse; the primacy of money has imposed the omnipresence of commodities; man has been transformed into an object of exchange in a context of mean hedonism; technology has ensnared the lifeworld in a network of rationalism — a world replete with delinquency, violence, and incivility, in which man is at war with himself and against all, i.e., an unreal world of drugs, virtual reality and media-hyped sports, in which the countryside is abandoned for unlivable suburbs and monstrous megalopolises, and where the solitary individual merges into an anonymous and hostile crowd, while traditional social, political, cultural or religious mediations become increasingly uncertain and undifferentiated.

This general crisis is a sign that modernity is reaching its end, precisely when the universalist utopia that established it is poised to become a reality under the form of liberal globalization. The end of the 20th century marks both the end of modern times and the beginning of a postmodernity characterized by a series of new themes: preoccupation with ecology, concern for the quality of life, the role of "tribes" and of "networks," revival of communities, the politics of group identities, multiplication of intra- and supra-state conflicts, the return of social violence, the decline of established religions, growing opposition to social elitism, etc. Having nothing new to say, and observing the growing malaise of contemporary societies, the agents of the dominant ideology are reduced to the clichés-ridden discourse so common in the media in a world threatened by implosion — *implosion*, not explosion, because modernity will not be transcended with a *grand soir* (a secular version of the Second Coming of Christ), but with the appearance of thousands of auroras, i.e., the birth of sovereign spaces liberated from the domination of the modern. Modernity will not be transcended by returning to the past, but by means of certain premodern values in a decisively postmodern dimension. It is only at the price of such a radical restructuring that anomie and contemporary nihilism will be exorcised.

Liberalism: The Main Enemy

Liberalism embodies the dominant ideology of modernity. It was the first to appear and will be the last to disappear. In the beginning, liberal thought contraposed an autonomous economy to the morality, politics and society in which it had been formerly embedded. Later, it turned commercial value into the essence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of all communal life. The advent of the "primacy of quantity" signaled this transition from market economics to market societies, i.e., the extension of the laws of commercial exchange, ruled by the "invisible hand," to all spheres of existence. On the other hand, liberalism also engendered modern individualism, both from a false anthropology and from the descriptive as well as normative view based on a one-dimensional man drawing his "inalienable rights" from his essentially asocial nature continually trying to maximize his best interest by eliminating any non-quantifiable consideration and any value unrelated to rational calculation.

This dual individualistic and economic impulse is accompanied by a Darwinian social vision which, in the final analysis, reduces social life to a generalized competition, to a new version of a "war of all against all" to select the "best." Aside from the fact that "pure and perfect" competition is a myth, since there are always power relations, it says absolutely nothing about the value of what is chosen: what is better or worse. Evolution selects those most apt to survive. But man is not satisfied with mere survival: he orders his life in a hierarchy of values about which liberals claim to remain neutral.

In the 20th century, the iniquitous character of liberal domination generated a legitimate reaction: the appearance of the socialist movement. Under the influence of Marxism, however, this movement became misdirected. Yet, despite their mutual hostility, liberalism and Marxism basically belong to the same universe and are both the heirs of Enlightenment thought: they share the same individualism, even the same universal egalitarianism, the same rationalism, the same primacy of economics, the same stress on the emancipatory value of labor, the same faith in progress, the same idea of an end of history. In almost all respects, liberalism has only realized more effectively certain objectives it shares with Marxism: the eradication of collective identities and traditional cultures, the disenchantment of the world, and the universalization of the system of production.

The ravages of the market have also triggered the rise and growth of the welfare state. Throughout history, the market and the state have appeared on an equal footing, the latter seeking to subject inter-communal, non-market exchange, which is intangible, to the law of money, and to turn homogeneous economic space into a tool of its power. The dissolution of communal bonds, spurred by the commercialization of social life, has necessitated the progressive strengthening of the welfare state, since it is entrusted with the redistribution necessary to mitigate the failures of traditional solidarity. Far from hindering liberalism, these statist interventions have allowed it to prosper by avoiding a social explosion, thus generating the security and stability indispensable to exchange. In return, the welfare state, which is nothing but an abstract, anonymous and opaque redistributive structure, has generalized irresponsibility, transforming the members of society into nothing more than recipients of public assistance, who no longer seek to overthrow the liberal system, but only to prolong the indefinite extension of rights with no *quid pro quo*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally, liberalism denies the specificity of politics, which always implies arbitrariness of decisions and plurality of goals. From this viewpoint, the term "liberal politics" appears to be a contradiction in terms. Seeking to form social bonds on the basis of a theory of rational choice that reduces citizenship to utility, it ends up with an ideal "scientific" management of global society by technical experts. The liberal state, all too often synonymous with a republic of judges, is committed to the parallel goals of abstaining from proposing a model of the good life while seeking to neutralize conflicts inherent in the diversity of social life by pursuing policies aimed at determining, by purely juridical procedures, what is just rather than what is good. The public sphere dissolves into the private, while representative democracy is reduced to a market in which supply becomes increasingly limited (concentration of programs and convergence of policies) and demand less and less motivated (abstention).

In the age of globalization, liberalism no longer presents itself as an ideology, but as a global system of production and reproduction of men and commodities, supplemented by the hypermodernism of human rights. In its economic, political and moral forms, liberalism represents the central bloc of the ideas of a modernity that is finished. Thus, it is the main obstacle to anything seeking to go beyond it.

Foundations

"Know thyself," said the oracle of Delphi. The key to any representation of the world, to any political, moral or philosophical engagement is, first of all, an anthropology, whereby activities are carried out through certain practical orders, which represent the essence of peoples' relations among themselves and with the world: politics, economics, technology, and ethics.

Man: An Aspect of Life

Modernity has denied any human nature (the theory of the *tabula rasa*) or it has related it back to abstract attributes disconnected from the real world and lived experience. As a consequence of this radical rupture, the ideal of a "new man," infinitely malleable through the brutal and progressive transformation of his environment, has emerged. In the 20th century, this utopia has resulted in totalitarianism and the concentration camps. In the liberal world, it has translated into the superstitious belief in an all-powerful environment, which has generated deceptions, in particular in the educational sphere: in a society structured by abstract rationality, cognitive ability is the main determinant of social status.

Man is first and foremost an animal. He exists as such in the order of living beings, which is measured in hundreds of millions of years. If one compares the history of organic life to one day (24 hours), the human species appeared only in the last thirty seconds. The process of humanization has unfolded over umpteen thousands of generations. To the extent that life is generated above all through the transmission of information contained in genetic material, man is not born

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a blank page: every single individual already bears the general characteristics of the species, to which are added specific hereditary predispositions to certain particular aptitudes and modes of behavior. The individual does not decide this inheritance, which limits his autonomy and his plasticity, but also allows him to resist political and social conditioning.

But man is not just an animal: what is specifically human in him — consciousness of his own consciousness, abstract thought, syntactic language, the capacity for symbolism, the aptitude for objective observation and value judgment — does not contradict his nature, but extends it by conferring on him a supplementary and unique identity. To deny man's biological determinants or to reduce them by relegating his specific traits to zoology is absurd. The hereditary part of humanity forms only the basis of social and historical life: human instincts are not programmed in their object, i.e., man always has the freedom to make choices, moral as well as political, which naturally are limited only by death. Man is an heir, but he can dispose of his heritage. He can construct himself historically and culturally on the basis of the presuppositions of his biological constitution, which are his human limitations. What lies beyond these limitations may be called God, the cosmos, nothingness, or Being. The question of "why" no longer makes sense, because what is beyond human limitations is by definition unthinkable.

Thus, the New Right proposes a vision of a well-balanced individual, taking into account both inborn, personal abilities and the social environment. It rejects ideologies that emphasize only one of these factors, be it biological, economic, or mechanical.

Man: A Rooted, Imperiled, and Open Being

By nature, man is neither good nor bad, but he is capable of being either one or the other. As an open and imperiled being, he is always able to go beyond himself or to debase himself. Man can keep this permanent threat at bay by constructing social and moral rules, as well as institutions and traditions, which provide a foundation for his existence and give his life meaning and references. Defined as the undifferentiated mass of individuals that constitutes it, humanity designates either a biological category (the species) or a philosophical category emanating from Western thought. From the socio-historical viewpoint, man as such does not exist, because his membership within humanity is always mediated by a particular cultural belonging. This observation does not stem from relativism. All men have in common their human nature, without which they would not be able to understand each other, but their common membership in the species always expresses itself in a single *context*. They share the same essential aspirations, which are always crystallized in different forms according to time and place.

In this sense, humanity is irreducibly plural: diversity is part of its very essence. Thus, human life is necessarily rooted in a given context, prior to the way individuals and groups see the world, even critically, and to the way they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

formulate their aspirations and goals. They do not exist in the real world other than as concretely rooted people. Biological differences are significant only in reference to social and cultural givens. As for differences between cultures, they are the effects neither of illusion nor of transitory, contingent or secondary characteristics. All cultures have their own "center of gravity" (Herder): different cultures provide different responses to essential questions. This is why all attempts to unify them end up destroying them. Man is rooted by nature in his culture. He is a singular being: he always locates himself at the interface of the universal (his species) and the particular (each culture, each epoch). Thus, the idea of an absolute, universal, and eternal law that ultimately determines moral, religious, or political choices appears unfounded. This idea is the basis of all totalitarianisms.

Human societies are both conflictual and cooperative, without being able to eliminate one to the benefit of the other. The ironic belief in the possibility of eliminating these antagonisms within a transparent and reconciled society has no more validity than the hypercompetitive (liberal, racist, or nationalist) vision that turns life into a perpetual war of individuals or groups. If aggressiveness is an essential part of the creativity and dynamism of life, evolution has also favored in man the emergence of cooperative (altruistic) behaviors evident not only in the sphere of genetic kinship. On the other hand, great historical constructions have been possible only by establishing a harmony based on the recognition of the common good, the reciprocity of rights and duties, cooperation and sharing. Neither peaceful nor belligerent, neither good nor bad, neither beautiful nor ugly, human existence unfolds in a tragic tension between these poles of attraction and repulsion.

Society: A Body of Communities.

Human existence is inseparable from the communities and social groups in which it reveals itself. The idea of a primitive "state of nature" in which autonomous individuals might have co-existed is pure fiction: society is not the result of a contract between men trying to maximize their best interests, but rather of a spontaneous association whose most ancient form is undoubtedly the extended family.

The communities within which society is grounded are constituted by a complex net of intermediary bodies situated among individuals, groups of individuals, and humanity. Some are inherited (native), others are chosen (cooperative). The social bond, whose autonomy the classical right parties have never recognized, and which should not be confused with "civil society," is defined, first and foremost, as a model for individual actions, not as the global effect of these actions. It rests on shared consent and is prior to this model. Membership in the collective does not destroy individual identity; rather, it is the basis for it. When one leaves one's original community, it is generally to join another one. Native or cooperative communities are all based on reciprocity. Communities are constituted and maintain themselves on the basis of who belongs to them. Membership is all that is required. There is a vertical reciprocity of rights and duties, contributions and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

distributions, obedience and assistance, and a horizontal reciprocity of gifts, fraternity, friendship, and love. The richness of social life is proportional to the diversity of the members: this diversity is constantly threatened either by shortcomings (conformity, lack of differentiation) or excesses (secession, atomization).

The holistic conception, where the whole exceeds the sum of its parts and possesses qualities none of its individual parts have, has been defeated by modern universalism and individualism, which have associated community with the ideas of submission to hierarchy, entanglement, or parochialism. This universalism and individualism have been deployed in two ways: the contract (politics) and the market (economics). But, in reality, modernity has not liberated man from his original familial belonging or from local, tribal, corporative or religious attachments. It has only submitted him to other constraints, which are harsher, because they are further away, more impersonal, and more demanding: a mechanistic, abstract, and homogenous subjugation has replaced multiform organic modes. In becoming more solitary, man also has become more vulnerable and more destitute. He has become disconnected from meaning, because he can no longer identify himself with a model, and because there is no longer any way for him to understand his place in the social whole. Individualism has resulted in disaffiliation, separation, deinstitutionalization (thus, the family no longer socializes), and the appropriation of the social bond by statist bureaucracies. In the final analysis, the great project of modern emancipation has resulted only in generalized alienation. Because modern societies tend to bring together individuals who experience each other as strangers, no longer having any mutual confidence, they cannot envision a social relation not subject to a "neutral" regulatory authority. The pure forms are exchange (a market system of the rule of the strongest) and submission (the totalitarian system of obedience to the all-powerful state). The mixed form that now prevails is a proliferation of abstract juridical rules that gradually intersect every area of existence, whereby relations with others are permanently controlled in order to ward off the threat of implosion. Only a return to communities and to a politics of human dimensions can remedy exclusion or dissolution of the social bond, its reification, and it juridification.

Politics: An Essence and an Art

Politics is consistent with the fact that the goals of social life are always multiple. Its essence and its laws cannot be reduced to economics, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, or the sacred. It both acknowledges and distinguishes between such notions as public and private, command and obedience, deliberation and decision, citizen and foreigner, friend and enemy. If there is morality in politics, since authority aims at a common good and is inspired by the collectivity's values and customs, this does not mean that an individual morality is politically applicable. Regimes which refuse to recognize the essence of politics, which deny the plurality of goals or favor depoliticization, are by definition "unpolitical."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Modern thought has developed the illusion of politics as "neutral," reducing power to managerial efficiency, to the mechanical application of juridical, technical or economic norms: the "government of men" ought to be modeled on the "administration of things." The public sphere, however, always affirms a particular vision of the "good life." This idea of the "good" precedes the idea of the "just" — not the other way around.

Domestically, the first aim of all political action is civil peace: internally, security and harmony between all members of society; externally, protection from foreign danger. Compared with this aim, the choice between values such as liberty, equality, unity, diversity and solidarity is arbitrary: it is not self-evident, but is a matter of the end result. Diversity of worldviews is one of the conditions for the emergence of politics. Because it recognizes the pluralism of aspirations and projects, democracy seeks to facilitate peaceful confrontations at all levels of public life; it is an eminently political form of government. If the individual considers himself to be part of a community, then he will behave as a citizen in a democracy, which is the only form of government that offers him participation in public discussions and decisions, as well as the ability to make something of himself and to excel through education. Politics is not a science, given over to reason or technology, but an art, calling for prudence before everything else. It always implies uncertainty, a plurality of choices, a decision about goals. The art of governing provides the power to arbitrate between various possibilities, along with the capacity for constraint. Power is never merely a *means* that has value only as a function of the goals it is supposed to serve.

According to Jean Bodin, heir of the French jurists of the Middle Ages (the "légistes"), the source of independence and liberty resides in the prince's unlimited sovereignty, modeled after papal absolutist power. This is the concept of a "political theology" based on the idea of a supreme political organ — a "Leviathan" (Hobbes) — charged with controlling body, spirit and soul. It inspired the unified and centralized absolutist nation-state, which tolerated neither local power nor the sharing of law with neighboring territorial powers. It was developed through administrative and judicial unification, the elimination of intermediary bodies (denounced as "feudal"), and the gradual eradication of all local cultures. Eventually, it became absolutist monarchy, revolutionary Jacobinism, and, finally, modern totalitarianism. But it also led to a "republic without citizens," in which there is nothing left between atomized civil society and the managerial state. To this model of political society, the French New Right contraposes the legacy of Althusius, where the source of independence and liberty resides in autonomy, and the state defines itself first and foremost as a federation of organized communities and multiple allegiances.

In this view, which has inspired both imperial and federal constructions, the existence of a delegation of sovereign powers never results in the people losing their ability to make or abrogate laws. In their variously organized collectivities,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the people (or "states") are the ultimate repository of sovereignty. The rulers are above each citizen individually, but they are always subordinate to the general will expressed by the body of citizens. The principle of subsidiarity rules at all levels.

The liberty of a collectivity is not antithetical to shared sovereignty. Ultimately, politics is not reduced to the level of the state: the public person is defined as a complex of groups, families and associations, of local, regional, national or supranational collectivities. Politics does not deny this organic continuity, but takes its support from it. Political unity proceeds from a recognized diversity, i.e., it must admit that there is something "opaque" in the social fabric: the perfect "transparency" of society is a utopia that does not encourage democratic communication; on the contrary, it favors totalitarian surveillance.

Economics: Beyond the Marketplace

As far as one goes back into the history of human societies, certain rules have presided over the production, circulation and consummation of the goods necessary to the survival of individuals and groups. For all that, and contrary to the presuppositions of liberalism and Marxism, the economy has never formed the infrastructure of society: economic over-determination ("economism") is the exception, not the rule. Moreover, numerous myths associated with the curses of labor (Prometheus, rape of the Mother-Earth), money (Croesus, Gullveig, Tarpecia), and abundance (Pandora) reveal that early on the economy was perceived as the "damned part" of all society, as an activity that threatened to destroy all harmony. The economy was thus devalued, not because it was not useful, but for the simple reason that it was only that. What is more, one was rich because one was powerful, and not the reverse, power being thus matched by a duty to share and to protect those under one's care. The "fetishism of commodities" as a peculiarity of modern capitalism was clearly recognized as a danger: production of abundance of different goods arouses envy, the mimetic desire, which in turn generates disorder and violence.

In all premodern societies, the economic was embedded and contextualized within other orders of human activity (Karl Polanyi). The idea that economic exchange from barter to the modern market always has been regulated by the confrontation of supply and demand, by the consequent emergence of an equivalent abstract (money) and of objective values (use values, exchange values, utility, etc.) is a fairy-tale invented by liberalism. The market is not an ideal model whose abstraction allows universalization. Before being a mechanism, it is an institution, and this institution can be abstracted neither from its history nor from the cultures that have generated it.

The three great forms of the circulation of goods are reciprocity (mutual gift-giving, equal or joint sharing), redistribution (centralization and distribution by a single authority), and exchange. They do not represent stages of development, but have more or less always coexisted. Modern society is characterized by a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hypertrophy of free market exchange, leading from an economy *with* a market, to a market society. The liberal economy has translated the ideology of progress into a religion of growth: the "ever more" of consumption is supposed to lead humanity to happiness. While it is undeniable that modern economic development has satisfied certain primary needs of a much larger number of people than previously possible, it is not any less true that the artificial growth of needs through the seductive strategies of the system of objects (advertising) necessarily ends in an impasse. In a world of finite resources, subject to the principle of entropy, a certain slowing of growth prefigures humanity's inevitable horizon.

Given the breadth of transformations it has brought about, the commodification of the world from the 16th to the 20th century has been one of the most important phenomena in human history. Decommodification will be one of the main phenomena in the 21th century. Thus, it is necessary to return to the origins of the economy ("*oikos-nomos*"), to the general laws of the human habitat in the world, which include those of ecological balance, human passion, respect for the harmony and beauty of nature, and, in a more general way, all the non-quantifiable elements that economic science has arbitrarily excluded from its calculations. All economic life implies the mediation of a large range of cultural institutions and juridical means. Today, the economy must be recontextualized within life, society, politics and ethics.

Ethics: The Construction of Oneself

The fundamental categories of ethics are universal: the distinctions between noble and ignoble, good and bad, admirable and despicable, just and unjust can be found everywhere. On the other hand, the designation and evaluation of behaviors relevant to each of these categories varies with epochs and societies. The French New Right rejects all purely moral views of the world, but it recognizes that no culture can avoid distinguishing between the ethical values of various attitudes and behaviors. Morality is indispensable to this open being that is man; it is an anthropological consequence of his freedom. In articulating general rules necessary for the survival of any society, moral codes become attached to customs (*mores*), and cannot be dissociated completely from the context in which they are practiced. But they cannot be seen only in terms of subjectivity. Thus, the adage "*my country, right or wrong*" does not mean that my country is always right, but that it remains my country even when it is wrong. This implies that I might eventually prove it wrong, which would mean that I subscribe to a norm beyond my belonging to it.

Since the Greeks, ethics for Europeans have designated virtues whose practice forms the basis of the "good life": generosity over avarice, honor over shame, courage over cowardice, justice over injustice, temperance over excess, duty over irresponsibility, rectitude over guile, unselfishness over greed, etc. The good citizen is one who always tries to strive for excellence in each of these virtues

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Aristotle). This will to excellence does not in any way exclude the existence of several modes of life (contemplative, active, productive, etc.), each arising from different moral codes, and each finding their place in the city's hierarchy. For example, European tradition, expressed in the ancient tripartite model, made wisdom prevail over force, and force over wealth. Modernity has supplanted traditional ethics, at once aristocratic and popular, by two kinds of bourgeois moral codes: the utilitarian (Bentham), based on the materialist calculation of pleasure and pain (what is good is what increases pleasure for the greatest number); and the deontological morality (Kant), based on a unitary conception of the just, toward which all individuals must strive in accord with a universal moral law. This last approach supports the ideology of human rights, which is at once a minimal moral code and a strategic weapon of Western ethnocentrism. This ideology is a contradiction in terms. All men have rights, but they would not know how to be entitled to them as isolated beings; a right expresses a relation of equity, which implies the social. Thus, no right is conceivable outside a specific context in which to define it, outside a society to recognize it and to define the duties which represent the counterpart to it, and the means of constraint sufficient to apply it. As for fundamental liberties, they are not decreed, but they must be conquered and guaranteed. The fact that Europeans have imposed by force a right to autonomy does not in any way imply that all the peoples of the planet must be held responsible for guaranteeing rights in the same way.

Against the "moral order," which confuses the social with the moral norm, ultimately Europeans must sustain the plurality of forms of social life, and think together about order and its opposite, Apollo and Dionysius. One can only avoid the relativism and nihilism of the "last man" (Nietzsche), who today reveals himself against the background of practical materialism, by restoring some meaning, i.e., by retrieving some shared values, and by assuming some concrete certainties that have been tried and defended by self-conscious communities.

Technology: The Mobilization of the World

Technology has been around from the very beginning; the absence of specific natural defenses, the deprogramming of instincts, and the development of cognitive capacities have proceeded apace with the transformation of the environment. But technology has long been regulated by non-technological imperatives: by the necessary harmony of man, city and cosmos, as well as by respect for nature as the home of Being, submission of Promethian power, Olympian wisdom, repudiation of *hubris*, concern for quality rather than productivity, etc.

The technological explosion of modernity is explained by the disappearance of ethical, symbolic or religious codes. It finds its distant roots in the biblical imperative: "replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis), which two millennia later Descartes revived when he urged man to "make himself the master and owner of nature." The dual theocentric split between the uncreated being and the created world is thus metamorphosed into a dual anthropocentric split between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

subject and object, the second unreservedly subjugated by the first. Modernity also has subjected science (the contemplative) to the technological (the operative), giving birth to an integrated "technoscience," whose only reason for being is accelerating ever more the transformation of the world. In the 20th century, there have been more upheavals than during the previous 15,000 years. For the first time in human history, each new generation is obliged to integrate itself into a world that the preceding one has not experienced.

Technology develops essentially as an autonomous system: every new discovery is immediately absorbed into the global power of the operative, which makes it more complex and reinforces it. Recent developments in information technology (cybernetics and computers) are accelerating this systemic integration at a prodigious rate, the Internet being the most well-known. This network has neither a center of decision-making nor one of entry and exit, but it maintains and constantly expands the interaction of millions of terminals connected to it.

Technology is not neutral; it obeys a number of values that guide its course: operability, efficiency, and performance. Its axiom is simple: everything that is possible can and will be realized effectively, the general belief being that additional technology will be able to rectify the defects of existing technology. Politics, the moral code, and law intervene *only afterwards* to judge the desirable or undesirable effects of innovation. The cumulative nature of technoscientific development, which experiences periods of stagnation but not regression, has long supported the ideology of progress by demonstrating the growth of the powers of man over nature, and by reducing risks and uncertainties. Thus, technology has given humanity new means of existence, but at the same time it has led to a loss of the reason for living, since the future seems to depend only on the indefinite extension of the rational mastering of the world. The resulting impoverishment is more and increasingly perceived as the disappearance of an authentically human life on earth. Having explored the infinitely small and then the infinitely large, technoscience now is tackling man himself, at once the subject and the object of his own manipulations (cloning, artificial procreation, genetic fingerprinting, etc.). Man is becoming the simple extension of the tools he has created, adopting a technomorphic mentality that increases his vulnerability.

Technophobia and technophilia are equally unacceptable. Knowledge and its application are not to blame, but innovation is not desirable simply because of its novelty. Against scientific reductionism, arrogant positivism and obtuse obscurantism, technological development should follow from social, ethical and political choices, as well as anticipations (the principle of prudence), and should be reintegrated within the context of a vision of the world as pluriversum and continuum.

The World: A Pluriversum

Diversity is inherent in the very movement of life, which flourishes as it becomes more complex. The plurality and variety of races, ethnic groups, languages, customs, even religions has characterized the development of humanity

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

since the very beginning. Consequently, two attitudes are possible. For one, this biocultural diversity is a burden, and one must always and everywhere reduce men to what they have in common, a process which cannot avoid generating a series of perverse effects. For the other, this diversity is to be welcomed, and should be maintained and cultivated. The French New Right is profoundly opposed to the suppression of differences. It believes that a good system is one that transmits at least as much diversity as it has received. The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples.

The West's conversion to universalism has been the main cause of its subsequent attempt to *convert* the rest of the world: in the past, to its religion (the Crusades); yesterday, to its political principles (colonialism); and today, to its economic and social model (development) or its moral principles (human rights). Undertaken under the aegis of missionaries, armies, and merchants, the Westernization of the planet has represented an imperialist movement fed by the desire to erase all otherness by imposing on the world a supposedly superior model invariably presented as "progress." Homogenizing universalism is only the projection and the mask of an ethnocentrism extended over the whole planet.

Westernization and globalization have modified the way the world is perceived. Primitive tribes called themselves "men," implying that they considered themselves their species' only representatives. A Greek and a Chinese, a Russian and an Inca could live in the same epoch without being conscious of each other's existence. Those times are past. Given the West's pretense to make the world over in its own image, the current age is a new one in which ethnic, historical, linguistic or cultural differences coexist fully aware of their identity and the otherness that reflects it. For the first time in history, the world is a pluriversum, a multipolar order in which great cultural groups find themselves confronting one another in a shared global temporality, i.e., in a zero hour. Yet, modernization is gradually becoming disconnected from Westernization: new civilizations are gradually acquiring modern means of power and knowledge without renouncing their historical and cultural heritage for the benefit of Western ideologies and values.

The idea of an "end of history," characterized by the global triumph of market rationality by generalizing the life-style and political forms of the liberal West, is obviously false. On the contrary, a new "Nomos of the Earth" is emerging — a new organization of international relations. Antiquity and the Middle Ages saw an unequal development of the great autarchic civilizations. The Renaissance and the Classical Age were marked by the emergence and consolidation of nation-states in competition for the mastery, first of Europe, then of the world. The 20th century witnessed the development of a bipolar world in which liberalism and Marxism confronted each other, the maritime American power and the continental Soviet power. The 21st century will be characterized by the development of a multipolar world of emerging civilizations: European, North American, South American, Arabic-Muslim, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, etc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These civilizations will not supplant the ancient local, tribal, provincial or national roots, but will be constituted as the ultimate collective form with which individuals are able to identify in addition to their common humanity. They will probably be called upon to collaborate in certain areas to defend humanity's common interests, notably with respect to ecology. In a multipolar world, power is defined as the ability to resist the influence of others rather than to impose one's own. The main enemy of this pluriverse will be any civilization pretending to be universal and regarding itself entrusted with a redeeming mission ("Manifest Destiny") to impose its model on all others.

The Cosmos: A Continuum

The French New Right adheres to a unitary worldview, the matter and form of which only constitute variations on the same theme. The world is at once a unity and a multiplicity, integrating different levels of the visible and the invisible, different perceptions of time and space, different laws of organization of its constituent elements. Microcosm and macrocosm interpenetrate and interact with one another. Thus, the French New Right rejects the absolute distinction between created and uncreated being, as well as the idea that this world is only the reflection of an other world. The cosmos (*phusis*) is the place where Being manifests itself, the place where the truth (*aletheia*) of mutual belonging in this cosmos reveals itself. "*Panta rhei*" (Heraclitus): the opening to all is in everything.

Man finds and gives sense to his life only by adhering to what is greater than himself, what transcends the limits of his constitution. The French New Right fully recognizes this anthropological constant, which manifests itself in all religions. It believes the return of the sacred will be accomplished by returning to some founding myths, and by the disappearance of false dichotomies: subject and object, body and thought, soul and spirit, essence and existence, rationality and sensibility, myth and logic, nature and supernatural, etc.

The disenchantment of the world translates into the closure of the modern spirit, which is incapable of projecting itself above and beyond its materialism and constituent anthropocentrism. Today's epoch has transferred the ancient divine attributes to the human subject (the metaphysics of subjectivity), thereby transforming the world into an object, i.e., into an agglomeration of means at the unlimited disposal of its ends. This ideal of reducing the world to utilitarian reason has been coupled with a linear concept of history endowed with a beginning (state of nature, paradise on earth, golden age, primitive communism, etc.) and an equally necessary end (a classless society, the reign of God, the ultimate stage of progress, entry into an era of pure rationality, transparent and conciliatory).

For the French New Right past, present, and future are not distinct moments of a directional and vectored history, but permanent dimensions of all lived moments. The past as well as the future always remain present in all their actuality. This presence — a fundamental category of time — is opposed to absence:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forgetfulness of origins and occlusion of the horizon. This view of the world already found expression in European antiquity, both in cosmological histories and in pre-Socratic thought. The "paganism" of the French New Right articulates nothing more than sympathy for this ancient conception of the world, always alive in hearts and minds precisely because it does not belong to yesterday, but is eternal. Confronted with the *ersatz* sectarianism of fallen religions, as well as with certain neopagan parodies from the times of confusion, the French New Right is imbued with a very long memory: it maintains a relation to the beginning that harbors a sense of what is coming.

Positions

Against Indifferentiation and Uprooting. For Clear and Strong Identities.

The unprecedented menace of homogenization which looms over the entire world leads to the pathological identities: bloody irredentisms, convulsive and chauvinistic nationalism, savage tribalizations, etc. Responsibility for these deplorable attitudes stems primarily from globalization (political, economic, technological, and financial), which produced these attitudes in the first place. By denying individuals the right to locate themselves within a collective and historical identity, by imposing a uniform mode of representation, the Western system has given birth to unhealthy forms of self-affirmation. Fear of the "Same" has replaced fear of the "Other." In France, this situation is aggravated by a crisis of the State which, for two centuries, has been the main symbolic social producer. Thus, the current weakening of the state has produced a greater void in France than in other Western nations.

The question of identity will assume even greater importance in the decades ahead. In undermining social systems that used to ascribe individuals their place in a clearly understood social order, modernity has actually encouraged questioning identity and has stirred up a desire for reliance and recognition in the public scene. But modernity has not been able to satisfy this need for identity. "World-wide tourism" is merely a pathetic alternative to withdrawing into one's own shell.

In regard to universalist utopias and the withering of traditional identities, the French New Right affirms the primacy of differences, which are neither transitory features leading to some higher form of unity, nor incidental aspects of private life. Rather, these differences are the very substance of social life. They can be native (ethnic, linguistic), but also political. Citizenship implies belonging, allegiance and participation in public life at different levels. Thus, one can be, at one and the same time, a citizen of one's neighborhood, city, region, nation, and of Europe, according to the nature of power devolved to each of these levels of sovereignty. By contrast, one cannot be a citizen of the world, for the "world" is not a political category. Wanting to be a citizen of the world is to link citizenship to an abstraction drawn from the vocabulary of the Liberal New Class.

The French New Right upholds the cause of peoples, because the right to difference is a principle which has significance only in terms of its generality. One

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is only justified in defending one's difference from others if one is also able to defend the difference of others. This means, then, that the right to difference cannot be used to exclude others who are different. The French New Right upholds equally ethnic groups, languages, and regional cultures under the threat of extinction, as well as native religions. The French New Right supports peoples struggling against Western imperialism.

Against Racism; For the Right to Difference

The term racism cannot be defined as a preference for endogamy, which arises from freedom of choice of individuals and of peoples. The Jewish people, for instance, owe their survival to their rejection of mixed marriages. Confronted with positions that are often simplistic, propagandist, or moralizing, it is necessary to come back to the real meaning of words: racism is a theory which postulates that there are qualitative inequalities between the races, such that, on the whole, one can distinguish races as either "superior" or "inferior"; that an individual's value is deduced entirely from the race to which he belongs; or, that race constitutes the central determining factor in human history. These three postulates may be held together or separately. All three are false. If existing races vary from one another as regards this or that statistically isolated criterion, there is no absolute qualitative difference among them. Nor is there a global paradigm outside mankind that would permit creating a racial hierarchy. Finally, it is evident that an individual receives his worth from those qualities which are his own. Racism is not a disease of the mind, generated by prejudice or "premodern" superstition. (Such an explanation is a liberal fable suggesting irrationality as the source of all social ills). Rather, racism is an erroneous doctrine, one rooted in time, which finds its source in scientific positivism, according to which one can "scientifically" measure absolutely the value of human societies, and in social evolutionism, which tends to describe the history of humanity as a single, unified history, divided into "stages" corresponding to various states of progress. (Thus certain peoples are seen as temporarily or permanently more "advanced" than others).

In contrast, to racism there is a universalist and a differentialist anti-racism. The former leads to the same conclusions as does the racism it denounces. As opposed to differences as is racism, universalist anti-racism only acknowledges in peoples their common belonging to species and it tends to consider their specific identities as transitory or of secondary importance. By reducing the "Other" to the "Same" through a strictly assimilationist perspective, universalist anti-racism is, by definition, incapable of recognizing or respecting otherness for what it is. Differentialist anti-racism, to which the New Right subscribes holds that the irreducible plurality of the human species constitutes a veritable treasure. Differentialist anti-racism makes every effort to restore an affirmative meaning to "the universal," not in opposition to "difference," but by starting from the recognition of "difference." For the New Right, the struggle against racism is not won by negat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing the concept of races, nor by the desire to blend all races into an undifferentiated whole. Rather, the struggle against racism is waged by the refusal of both exclusion and assimilation: neither apartheid nor the melting pot; rather, acceptance of the other as Other through a dialogic perspective of mutual enrichment.

3. Against Immigration; For Cooperation

By reason of its rapid growth and its massive proportions, immigration such as one sees today in Europe constitutes an undeniably negative phenomenon. Essentially, it represents a mode of forced uprooting the cause of which is, first of all, economic — spontaneous or organized movements from poor and overpopulated countries to countries which are rich. But the cause is also symbolic — the attraction of Western civilization and the concomitant depreciation of indigenous cultures in light of the growing consumer — oriented way of life. The responsibility for current immigration lies primarily, not with the immigrants, but with the industrialized nations which have reduced man to the level of merchandise that can be relocated anywhere. Immigration is not desirable for the immigrants, who are forced to abandon their native country for another where they are received as back-ups for economic needs. Nor is immigration beneficial for the host population receiving the immigrants, who are confronted, against their will, with sometimes brutal modifications in their human and urban environments. It is obvious that the problems of the Third World countries will not be resolved by major populations shifts. Thus the New Right favors policies restrictive of immigration, coupled with increased cooperation with Third World countries where organic interdependence and traditional ways of life still survive, in order to overcome imbalances resulting from globalization.

As regards the immigrant populations which reside today in France, it would be illusory to expect their departure *en masse*. The Jacobin national state has always upheld a model of assimilation in which only the individual is absorbed into a citizenship which is purely abstract. The state holds no interest in the collective identities nor in the cultural differences of these individuals. This model becomes less and less credible in view of the following factors: the sheer number of immigrants, the cultural differences which sometimes separate them from the population receiving them, and especially the profound crises which affect all the channels of traditional integration (parties, unions, religions, schools, the army, etc.). The New Right believes that ethnocultural identity should no longer be relegated to the private domain, but should be acknowledged and recognized in the public sphere. The New Right proposes, then, a communitarian model which would spare individuals from being cut off from their cultural roots and which would permit them to keep alive the structures of their collective cultural lives. They should be able to observe necessary general and common laws without abandoning the culture which is their very own. This communitarian politic could, in the long run, lead to a disassociation of citizenship from nationality.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

4. Against Sexism; For the Recognition of Gender

The distinction of the sexes is the first and most fundamental of natural differences, for the human race only insures its continuation through this distinction. Being sexual from the very outset, humanity is not one, but rather two. Beyond mere biology, difference inscribes itself in *gender* — masculine and feminine. These determine, in social life, two different ways of perceiving the Other and the world, and they constitute, for individuals, their mode of sexual destiny. The existence of a feminine and masculine nature is evident. However, this does not preclude the fact that individuals of each sex may diverge from these categories due to genetic factors or sociocultural choices. Nonetheless, in general, a large number of values and attitudes fall into feminine and masculine categories: cooperation and competition, mediation and repression, seduction and domination, empathy and detachment, concrete and abstract, affective and managerial, persuasion and aggression, synthetic intuition and analytic intellection, etc. The modern concept of abstract individuals, detached from their sexual identity, stemming from an "indifferentialist" ideology which neutralizes sexual differences, is just as prejudicial against women as traditional sexism which, for centuries, considered women as incomplete men. This is a twisted form of male domination, which in the past had excluded women from the arena of public life, and admits them today — on the condition that they divest themselves of their femininity.

Some universalist feminists claim that masculine and feminine genders stem from a social construct ("One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman"). In this way, feminism falls into a male-centered trap as it adheres to "universal" and abstract values which are, in the final analysis, masculine values. The New Right supports a differentialist feminism which, to the contrary, wants sexual difference to play a role in the public domain and upholds specifically feminine rights (the right to virginity, to maternity, to abortion). Against sexism and unisex utopianism, differentialist feminism recognizes men as well as women by acknowledging the equal value of their distinct and unique natures.

5. Against the New Class; For Autonomy from the Bottom up

In the process of globalization, Western civilization is promoting the worldwide domination of a ruling class whose only claim to legitimacy resides in its abstract manipulations (logico-symbolic) of the signs and values of the system already in place. Aspiring to uninterrupted growth of capital and to the permanent reign of social engineering, this New Class provides the manpower for the media, large national and multinational firms, and international organizations. This New Class produces and reproduces everywhere the same type of person: cold-blooded specialists, rationality detached from day to day realities. It also engenders abstract individualism, utilitarian beliefs, a superficial humanitarianism, indifference to history, an obvious lack of culture, isolation from the real world, the sacrifice of the real to the virtual, an inclination to corruption, nepotism and to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buying votes. All of this fits in with the tactic of mergers and the globalization of world-wide domination. The further that those in power distance themselves from the average citizen, the less they feel the need to justify their decisions. The more a society offers its citizens impersonal tasks to do, the less that society is open to workers of real quality; the less the private domain encroaches upon the public domain, the less are individual achievements recognized and acknowledged by the public; the more one is obliged to "fulfill a function," the less one is able to "play a role." The New Class depersonalizes the leadership of Western societies and even lessens their sense of responsibility.

Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, the New Class finds itself again confronted with a whole series of conflicts (between capital and labor, equality and freedom, the public and the private) which it had attempted to avoid for over a half a century. Likewise, its ineffectiveness, its wastefulness, and its counter-productivity appear more and more evident. The system tends to close in upon itself, while the public feels indifferent toward or angry at a managerial elite which does not even speak the same language as they do. As regards every major social issue, the gulf widens between the rulers who repeat the usual technocratic discourse and those governed who experience, in their day to day lives, the consequences of all this. All the while the media draw attention away from the real world towards one of mere representation. At the highest levels of society, we find technocratic double talk, sanctimonious babble, and the comfort of capital yield; at the bottom of the social ladder, the pains of day-to-day life, an incessant search for meaning, and the desire for shared values.

Average citizens have nothing but scorn for the "elite" and they are indifferent to the traditional political factions and agendas which have today become obsolete. Satisfying the people's (or populist) aspirations would entail giving more autonomy to structures at the lower end of the social ladder, giving them the opportunity to create or recreate specific *nomoi*. In order to create a more "user friendly" society, one would have to avoid the anonymity of the masses, the commodification of values, and the reification of social relations. Rather, local communities would have to make decisions by and for themselves in all those matters which concern them directly, and all members would have to participate at every stage of the deliberations and of the democratic decision-making. It is not the Welfare State that ought to decentralize in their favor. Rather, it is the local communities themselves that ought not cede to State power to intervene except in those matters for which they are not able or competent to make decisions.

6. Against Jacobinism; For a Federal Europe

The first Thirty Years War, concluded by the Treaty of Westphalia, marked the establishment of the nation-state as the dominant mode of political organization. The second Thirty Years War (1914-45) signaled, to the contrary, the start of disintegration of the nation-state. Born out of absolute monarchy and revolutionary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jacobinism, the nation-state is now too big to manage little problems and too small to address big ones. In a globalized world, the future belongs to large cultures and civilizations capable of organizing themselves into autonomous entities and of acquiring enough power to resist outside interference. Europe must organize itself into a federal structure, while recognizing the autonomy of all the component elements and facilitating the cooperation of the constituent regions and of individual nations. European civilization will remake itself, not by the negation, but by the recognition of historical cultures, thus permitting all inhabitants to rediscover their common origins. The principle of subsidiarity ought to be the keystone at every level. Authority at the lower levels should not be delegated to authorities at the upper levels except in those matters which escape the competence of the lower level.

As opposed to the centralizing tradition, which confiscates all powers to establish a single level of control, as opposed to a bureaucratic and technocratic Europe, which relinquishes sovereignty without transferring it to a higher level, as opposed to a Europe which will only be a big market unified by free trade, as opposed to a "Europe of Nations," a mere assemblage of national egos which cannot prevent future wars, as opposed to a "European Nation" which is nothing more than a larger version of the Jacobin state, as opposed to all of the above, Europe (Western, Central, and Eastern) must reorganize itself from the bottom up, in close continental association with Russia. The existing states must federalize themselves from within, in order better to federalize with each other. Each level of the association should have its own role and its own dignity, not derived from approval from above, but based on the will and consent of all those who participate. The only decisions that would come from the summit of this structure would be those relating to all the peoples and federal communities: diplomatic matters, military affairs, big economic issues, fundamental legal questions, protection of the environment, etc. European integration is equally necessary in certain areas of research, industry, and new communications technology. A single currency ought to be managed by a central bank under the control of European political authority.

7. Against Depoliticization; For the Strengthening of Democracy

Democracy did not first appear with the Revolutions of 1776 and 1789. Rather, it has constituted a constant tradition in Europe since the existence of the ancient Greek city and since the time of the ancient German "freedoms." Democracy is not synonymous with former "popular democracies" of the East nor with liberal parliamentary democracy today so prevalent in Western countries. Nor does democracy refer to the political party system. Rather, it denotes a system whereby the people are sovereign. Democracy is not endless discussion and debate, but rather a popular decision in favor of the common good. The people may delegate their sovereignty to managers whom they appoint, but they may not relinquish that sovereignty. Majority rule, exercised through the vote, does not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imply that truth necessarily proceeds from majority vote; this is only a technique to assure, as closely as possible, an agreement between the people and their leaders. Democracy is also the system best suited to take care of a society's pluralism: by peaceful resolution of conflicts in ideas and by maintaining a positive relationship between the majority and the minority, by maintaining freedom of expression for minorities, because the minority could be tomorrow's majority.

In democracy, where the people are the subject of constituent power, the fundamental principle is that of political equality. This principle is quite distinct from that of the legal equality of all people, which can give birth to no form of government (equality of all human beings is an apolitical equality, because it lacks the corollary of any possible inequality). Democratic equality is not an anthropological principle (it tells us nothing about the nature of man); it does not claim that all men are *naturally* equal, but only that all citizens are *politically* equal, because they all belong to the same political body. It is, thus, a substantial equality, based upon belonging or membership. As with all political principles, it implies the possibility of a distinction, in this case between citizens and non-citizens. The essential idea of democracy is neither that of the individual nor of humanity, but rather the idea of a body of citizens politically united into a people. Democracy is the system which situates within the people the source of power's legitimacy and then attempts to achieve, as closely as possible, the common identity of the governors and the governed. The objective, existential difference between the one and other can never be a difference of quality. This common identity is the expression of the identity of the people which, through its representatives, has the opportunity to be politically present through its action and participation in public life. Non-voting and turning one's back on public issues rob democracy of its very meaning.

Today, democracy is threatened by a whole series of off-shoots and aberrations: the crisis of representation, the interchangeability of political programs, non-consultation of the people in cases of major decisions affecting their very lives, corruption and technocracy, the disqualification of political parties, many of which have become machines geared primarily toward their election to office and whose candidates are often chosen only on the basis of their ability to be elected, the dominance of lobbyists upholding their private interests over the common good, etc. Add to all this the fact that the modern model of politics is obsolete: political parties are almost all reformist, while most governments are more or less impotent. "The seizure of power," or "political takeover," in the Leninist sense of the term, now leads to nothing. In a world of networks, revolt may be possible, but not revolution.

Renewing the democratic spirit implies not settling for mere representative democracy, but seeking to also put into effect, at every level, a true participatory democracy ("that which affects all the people should be the business of all the people"). In order to achieve this, it will be necessary stop regarding politics as exclusively a state matter. Each citizen must be involved in the pursuit of the common

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good. Each common good must be identified and upheld as such. The self-absorbed consumer and the passive spectator-citizen will only become involved by the development of a radically decentralized form of democracy, beginning from the bottom, thereby giving to each citizen a role in the choice and control of his destiny. The procedure of referendum could also be useful. To counteract the overwhelming power of money, the supreme authority in modern society, there must be imposed the widest separation possible between wealth and political power.

8. Against Productivism; For New Forms of Labor

Work (in French travail, from the Latin *tripalium*, an instrument of torture) has never occupied a central position in ancient or traditional societies, including those which never practiced slavery. Because it is born of the constraints of necessity, work does not exercise our freedom, as does the work accomplished wherein an individual may see an expression of himself. It is modernity which, through its productivist goal of totally mobilizing all resources, has made of work a value in itself, the principal mode of socialization, and a illusory form of emancipation and of the autonomy of the individual ("freedom through work"). Functional, rational, and monetized, this is "heteronomous" work that individuals perform most often by obligation than out of vocation, and this work holds meaning for them only in terms of buying power, which can be counted out and measured. Production serves to stimulate consumption, which is needed as a compensation for time put in working. Work has thus been gradually monetized, forcing individuals to work for others in order to pay those who work for them. The possibility of receiving certain services freely and then reciprocating in some way has totally disappeared in a world where nothing has any value, but everything has a price (i.e. a world in which anything that cannot be quantified in monetary terms is held as negligible or non-existent). In a salaried society, each one gives up his time, more often than not, in trying to earn a living.

Now, due to new technologies, we produce more and more goods and services with constantly fewer workers. In Europe, these gains in productivity result in unemployment and they destabilize some of society's very structures. Such productivity favors capital, which uses unemployment and relocation of workers to weaken the negotiating power of salaried workers. Thus, today the individual worker is not so much exploited, than rendered more and more useless; exclusion replaces alienation in a world ever globally richer, but where the number of poor people constantly increases (so much for the classic theory of trickle-down economics). Even the possibility of returning to full employment would demand a complete break with productivism and the gradual end of an era where payment by salary is the principal means of integration into social life.

The reduction of the length of the work week is a secular given which makes obsolete the Biblical imperative: "You will labor by the sweat of your brow." Negotiated reductions in the length of the work week and the concomitant increase of new workers to share their work ought to be encouraged, as well as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the possibility of flexible adjustments (annual leaves, sabbaticals, job training courses, etc.) for every type of "heteronomous" job: to work less in order to work *better* and in order to have some time for oneself to live and enjoy life. In today's society, the attraction and promise of goods grow ever larger, but increasing also is the number of people whose buying power is stagnating or even diminishing. Thus, it is imperative gradually to disassociate work from income. The possibility must be explored of establishing a fixed minimum stipend or income for every citizen from birth until death and without asking anything in return.

9. Against the Ruthless Pursuit of Current Economic Policies; For an Economy at the Service of the People.

Aristotle made a distinction between "*oeconomie*," which has as its goal to satisfy man's needs, and "*chrématisque*," whose ultimate end is production, the earning and appropriation of money. Industrial capitalism has been gradually overtaken by a financial capitalism whose goal is to realize maximum returns in the short run, all to the detriment of the condition of national economies and of the long-term interest of the people. This metamorphosis was brought about by the easy availability of credit, widespread speculation, issuance of unreliable bonds, widespread indebtedness of individuals, firms, and nations, the dominant role of international investors, mutual funds that seek to make speculative profits, etc. The ubiquity of capital allows the financial markets to control politics. Economies become uncertain and even precarious, while the immense world financial bubble bursts from time to time, sending shock-waves throughout the entire financial network.

Economic thought is, moreover, couched in mathematical formulas which claim to be scientific by excluding any factor that cannot be quantified. Thus, the macroeconomic indices (GDP, GNP, the growth rate, etc.) reveal nothing about the actual condition of a society: disasters, accidents, or epidemics are here counted as positive, since they stimulate economic activity.

Faced with arrogant wealth, which aims only at growing larger still by capitalizing on the inequalities and sufferings that it itself engenders, it is imperative to restore the economy to the service of individuals and their quality of life. The first steps should include: instituting, at an international level, a tax on all financial transactions, to canceling the debt of Third World countries, and drastically revising the entire system of economic development. Priority should be given to self-sufficiency and to the needs of internal, national and regional markets. There needs to be an end to the international system of the division of labor. Local economies must be freed from the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF. Environmental laws ought to be enacted on an international scale. A way has to be found out of the double impasse of ineffective governmental economies, on the one hand, and hyper-competitive market-oriented economies, on the other, by strengthening a third sector (partnerships, mutual societies, and cooperatives) as well as autonomous organizations of mutual aid based on shared responsibility, voluntary membership, and non-profit organizations.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

10. Against Gigantism; For Local Communities

The tendency to over-expansion and concentration produces isolated individuals who are thus more vulnerable and defenseless. Widespread exclusion and social uncertainty are the logical consequences of this system, which has wiped out almost all possibilities of reciprocity and solidarity. Faced with traditional vertical pyramids of domination that inspire no confidence, faced with bureaucracies that are reaching more and more rapidly their level of incompetence, we enter a world of all sorts of cooperative networks. The former tension between a homogenous civil society and a monopolistic Welfare State has, little by little, been reduced by the existence today of a whole web of organizations supportive of deliberative and well-functioning communities which are forming at every level of social life: the family, the neighborhood, the village, the city, the professions and in leisure pursuits. It is only at this local level that one can create a standard of living worthy of human beings, not a fragmented life, and free of the demanding imperatives of speed, mobility and return on investment. This standard of living would be supported by fundamental, shared values, directed at the common good. Solidarity must no longer be seen as the result of an anonymous equality (poorly) guaranteed by the Welfare State, but rather as the result of a reciprocity implemented from the bottom up by organic communities taking charge of such matters as insurance and equitable distribution. Only responsible individuals in responsible communities can establish a social justice which is not synonymous with welfare.

This return to the local community will, of its very nature, return to families their natural vocation to provide education, socialization, and mutual support. This will, in turn, permit individuals to interiorize social rules and laws which, today, are simply imposed from above and outside. The revitalization of local communities must also be accompanied by a renaissance of popular traditions that which modernity has largely caused to decline. Even worse, modernity has often tried to "market" these cultural traditions for the only benefit of tourists ("folkloric" shows). Fostering social interaction and a sense of celebration, such traditions inculcate a sense of life's cycles and provide temporal landmarks. Emphasizing rhythmic passing of the ages and of the seasons, great moments in life, and the stages of the passing year, they nourish symbolic imagination and they create a social bond. These traditions must never frozen in time, but are in a constant state of renewal.

11. Against Megalopolis; For Cities on a Human Scale

Urbanism has, for more than fifty years, surrendered to the aesthetic of the ugly: bedroom communities with no horizon, residential areas totally lacking soul, grimy suburbs serving as municipal dumping grounds, endless malls which disfigure the approaches to every city, the proliferation of anonymous "non-places" given over to visitors who are all in a hurry, downtown areas given over totally to business and stripped of their traditional form of social life (cafés, universities, theaters, cinemas, public parks, etc.), disparate styles of apartment buildings, run-down neighborhoods, or to the contrary, neighborhoods constantly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

under hidden-camera surveillance and monitored by citizen patrols, the population shift from rural areas and concomitant urban crowding. They no longer build homes for living in but rather for surviving in an urban environment spoiled by the law of maximum financial return on investment and cold practicality. However, a place is, first and foremost, a link: working, moving about, living are not separate functions, but complex acts encompassing the totality of social life.

The city needs to be rethought as the locus of all our potentialities, the labyrinth of our passions and actions, rather than as the cold, geometric expression of economic order. Architecture and urbanism are practiced in the context of a local history and a particular geography which they should reflect. This would entail the revitalization of an urbanism rooted in and harmonious with the local community, the revival of regional styles, the development of villages and moderate-sized towns in a network centered around regional capital cities. It would also imply the opening up of rural areas, the gradual dismantling of bedroom communities and areas that are now strictly commercial or business, the elimination of now ubiquitous advertising, as well as diversification of means of transportation: undoing the current tyranny of the private car, increasing transportation of goods by rail, revitalizing public transportation, taking into consideration ecological imperatives.

12. Against Unbridled Technology; For an Integral Ecology

In a finite world, there are limits to growth. Resources, like growth itself, eventually reach their limit. The rapid generalization of western levels of production and consumption throughout the whole world could lead, within several decades, to the depletion of most available resources and to a series of climatic and atmospheric disasters with unforeseen consequences for the human race. The disregard shown for nature, the exponential undermining of biodiversity, the alienation of man by the machine, the depletion of our food supplies, all prove that "always more" is not synonymous with "always better." Various ecological groups have upheld this position, which rejects totally the ideology of unlimited progress. We need to become more aware of our responsibilities as regards the organic and inorganic worlds in which we all move about.

The "megamachine" knows only one law — maximum return on investments. This must be countered with the principle of responsibility, which demands that the present generation act in such a way that future generations live in a world which is no less beautiful, no less rich, and no less diverse than the world we know today. We must also affirm the importance of the concrete person over acquisition of wealth, power, and goods (to be more instead of to have more). Sound ecology calls us to move beyond modern anthropocentrism toward the development of a consciousness of the mutual co-existence of mankind and the cosmos. This "immanent transcendence" reveals nature as a partner and not as an adversary or object. This does not diminish the unique importance of mankind, but it does deny to man his exclusive position that Christianity and classical humanism had assigned him. Economic *hubris* and promethean technology must

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be held in check by a sense of balance and harmony. A world-wide effort must be undertaken to establish binding norms and guidelines for the preservation of biodiversity. Man has obligations to the animal and vegetal world. In like manner, standards must be set, worldwide, for the reduction of pollution. Firms and corporations which pollute should be taxed in proportion to the damage done. A certain level of de-industrialization in the field of food-processing might favor local production and consumption as well as diversification of food sources. Approaches sympathetic to the cyclical renewal of natural resources must be sustained in the Third World and given priority in "developed" societies.

13. For Independence of Thought and a Return to Discussion of Ideas

Incapable of renewing itself, powerless and disillusioned by the failure of its objectives, modern thought has slowly transformed itself into a form of "thought police" whose purpose is to excommunicate all those who diverge in any way from the currently dominant ideological dogmas. Former revolutionaries have rallied around the *status quo* while carrying over from their former lives a taste for purges and anathemas. This new form of treachery relies upon the tyranny of public opinion, as fashioned by the media, and takes the form of cleansing hysteria, enervating mawkishness or selective indignation. Rather than trying to understand the approaching new century, they keep rehearsing out-dated issues, recycling old arguments, which are nothing more than a means to exclude or to discredit opponents. The reduction of politics to the sound management of increasingly problematic growth excludes the possibility of radically changing society or even the possibility of an open discussion of the ultimate goals of collective action.

Democratic debate thus finds itself reduced to nothing. One no longer discusses, one denounces. One no longer reasons, one accuses. One no longer proves, one imposes. All thoughts, all writings suspect of "deviation" or even of "drifting" are represented as consciously or unconsciously sympathetic to ideologies that are held to be highly suspect. Incapable of developing their own ideas or even of refuting the ideas of others, these censors fight not only against opinions, but also against supposed intentions. This unprecedented decline of critical thought is still more aggravated in France by Parisian navel-gazing. Thus, we have come to forget the traditional rules of civilized debate. One also begins to forget that freedom of opinion, whose disappearance has largely been met with indifference, allows for no exceptions. Fearing free choice by the people and disdaining their aspirations, one prefers the ignorance of the masses.

The New Right advocates a return to critical thinking and strongly supports total freedom of expression. Faced with censorship, "disposable" ideas and the futility of passing fads, the New Right insists, now more than ever, on the need for a true renewal of critical thinking. The New Right advocates a return to debating issues, freed from the old divisions and fixed positions which block new approaches to old problems as well as new syntheses. The New Right calls all free minds to join in a common front against the disciples of Trissotin, Tartuffe, and Torquemada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Intervention in Kosovo

Peter Schneider

The war in Kosovo is heartbreaking for everyone whose feelings are not limited by their convictions. Watching the daily television images of refugees and the NATO bombings, only dogmatists could be satisfied by their arguments for or against the war. Opponents and advocates of the invention alike should concede their mixed emotions, and there is no reason to deny similar scruples to the political leadership of the Western alliance. It is not useful to make moralizing distinctions in this war, such as between good people, defenders of peace, and power-hungry militarists eager to use any chance to try out new weapons. So far, no one has come up with a minimally convincing argument for the claim that the NATO intervention concerns natural resources, strategic positions, territorial expansion, etc. On the contrary, this war is about the establishment of an elementary principle: legitimate sovereignty and the domestic concerns of a state do not include the systematic expulsion, rape, and murder of a segment of the population.

The objection that one cannot intervene in Kosovo, because there was no intervention in Rwanda and elsewhere, conveys a valid accusation, but it would be absurd to conclude that action in Kosovo is prohibited. Such a prohibition would amount to the cynical axiom that the terrible failure of the world community in Rwanda necessitates a duty to further failures. While the increased misery of the refugees in the context of the bombings tempted me to side with the anti-interventionists, in the end their arguments turn out to rely on intellectual and moral self-deception. In principled terms, the dispute between violence and non-violence is clear. While there may be no just war, there are necessary and unavoidable ones. Well before the massacres in Bosnia, it was clear that one does not remain innocent if one refrains from offering timely opposition to dictators and tyrants, if necessary with force. As shown by the reports of Marc Danner, Roger Cohen, and others, the reluctance of the world community to intervene in Bosnia was an incitement to mass murder, and, in the case of the former enclave, the United Nation's "protected zone" Srebrnica, the world community, the United Nations and its commissioner were nothing less than accomplices. The opponents of intervention cannot lay claim to some higher morality. They should face up to the fact that they passively stand by and watch the expulsion and massacre of civilians, while they almost automatically minimize or relativize their suffering, with the claim that it is really a "civil war" — all this just in order to protect their own philosophy, not the victims. It appears that they still have no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other alternative than to fantasize about "untried diplomatic possibilities," which were exhausted long ago.

As in Bosnia, so in Kosovo: the opponents of intervention tend to blur the difference between culprits and victims and between cause and effect. Hundreds of thousands of anti-NATO demonstrators are not interested in hearing that there were hundreds of destroyed villages, thousands of dead, and hundreds of thousands of refugees before the first NATO bomb fell. Anyone who, on the basis of principle opposes intervention against an aggressor prepared to take any action should consistently reject and denounce the war against Hitler as well. (In the discussion of whether Germany should participate in the Bosnia intervention, it was bizarre and, frankly, ghoulish to hear how a recognition of the history of German guilt was turned into a privilege. Thus, some were prepared to accept the possibility that young Swedes, Danes, French, and Dutch might risk their lives for human rights; yet, given the Nazi past, Germans, so it was claimed, should be spared. Amos Oz provoked the German peace movement with his comment that the popular lesson of "no more war" does not do justice to the history of the anti-Hitler coalition, and that it should be replaced with "no more aggression.") The only way the current bombing war in Kosovo might have been prevented would have been through war, a much earlier military intervention: when Milosevic broke various agreements and sent tanks and infantry into Kosovo. It is, therefore, time to rethink the notion that military force should only be used as a "last resort." An earlier military intervention in Kosovo would have contributed to minimizing the violence. The allegedly non-violent instrument of economic sanctions appears to have cost a thousand times more civilian victims than the bombing of Baghdad in the first Gulf War.

Of course, advocating or opposing military intervention depends on moral and political criteria. Both interventionists and anti-interventionists have to face questions about the costs and success of their options. An inefficient or possibly counter-productive military strategy can rapidly become morally questionable. The NATO bombing did not initiate the expulsions in Kosovo, but it would be idiotic to deny that it did magnify and accelerate them. The consequences of a long-term bombing campaign remain an open question. One can hardly argue that a humanitarian catastrophe has to be worsened in order to stop it. (At the same time, however, one cannot discount the gratitude of the victims that the West finally decided to stop standing by passively and has begun to do battle with the culprit.) It could also have been foreseen that bombing would elicit a strengthened solidarity between the Serb population and Milosevic, thereby reducing room for internal opposition.

NATO spokesmen try to convince us of what we want to believe: that we can win the war against raging, inhuman thugs on the ground through superior software and computer orders in the air — without losing a single airplane or the life of a NATO soldier. This calculation has been accurate. NATO did lose one expensive airplane but not a single life in its own ranks. The calculation is, however,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terrible on the other side: as far as we know, the bombing has not prevented a single Serbian soldier from burning, expelling, and murdering in the Albanian villages and cities.

The West has consistently attempted to ignore the terrible bet of the gambler Milosevic. "We Serbians are prepared to die; we will risk our lives. But you want to wage war without waging war. We'll see who has the greater tenacity." Legitimacy does not depend on the size of the bet. One wishes for nothing more than that the civilized world could stop the ethnic madness in Kosovo via electronic superiority and from the safety of the air. But what if that is not enough? "The world is not ready to fight for Moslems," Karadcic could claim in the Bosnia war. A mere 1500 soldiers of his army sufficed to seize the UN-guaranteed protected zone of Srebrenica and to carry out the worst massacre of the war. Two thousand soldiers from the Rapid Reaction Force, which had already landed, would have been enough to stop the bands of murderers, but they had no order to intervene. The lesson to draw from this terrible sequence is that an unscrupulous player, who is ready to do anything, can nullify a powerful military apparatus, as long as he can assume that the willingness of his opponent to use force is linked to the condition that no lives may be lost. NATO revealed this weakness to Milosevic through the promise not to send in any ground troops. A military force, even the most powerful in the world, with the credo "Zero dead," cannot win a war in even a tiny area such as Kosovo, hardly bigger than Los Angeles.

No one can deny that the inability of Western democracies to dispose of the lives of their citizens on command is one of their finest accomplishments. Perhaps nothing is uglier in a dictatorship than the usurped right of their leaders to be able to risk arbitrarily the lives of their subjects. But the four-year war in Bosnia also showed that the civilizational progress is marred by a constitutive weakness. We live in a world in which the possibility of a sudden outburst of barbarism, the danger of a sudden collapse of society and its safety rules, has been pushed out of the horizon of thought and action; indeed, it is nearly forgotten. Even the mere question if I or another would be prepared to risk our lives for the Kosovar Albanians is treated as merely rhetorical. There appears to be no debate over the conclusion that is drawn: if one is not prepared to take a risk, one cannot expect anyone else to do so either. Yet, this apparently obvious claim is untenable and demagogic.

If we were seated in a cafe in Berlin or Frankfurt, and a horde of armed men started to drag out all redheads and load them onto trucks, a few of us might resist the invaders. But most would stay seated, legitimately claiming that the armed forces of democratic order would stop the criminals, if necessary risking their own lives. This expectation is not disproved by the objection that we ourselves have not intervened and taken the same risk. We might also argue that our own engagement would be pointless, since we lack the specialized training for that sort of action. Asked if we would participate in a civilian guard, if the police were not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nearby or had not been sent, we might hesitate, but we could not answer with a principled no. The situation might plausibly arise in which the mandate to defend democracy and human rights returns directly to its source: the citizen. The point of the example is to show that the citizens of a community, even a consumer democracy like our own, tacitly presume everyday that the basic rules of a social contract are protected, even if such protection risks lives. In an interconnected world, it is impossible to restrict this protection to national borders.

The Lessons of Auschwitz and the Lessons of Uri: Brief Comments on the Telos *Symposium on Kosovo*

Rick Johnstone

The problem with "Europeans want Peace" is that they do not oppose genocidal war. They have not learned the lesson of the 1930s (that timely intervention — with American support that was sadly lacking but would end up coming anyway — could have stopped Hitler and saved millions of lives in Europe), or the lesson of Auschwitz (that genocidal crimes may warrant such intervention). Nor do they see that the "European sovereign state" they refer to, i.e., Yugoslavia, was actually a disintegrating communist federation, whose constituent units have the right to choose whether to re-federate or go off on their own (like Slovenia), or that the "right of all peoples to self-determination" applies as much to Kosovo as anywhere else. And they are inexcusably silent about the evil doings of the Milosevic regime over the last ten years, and the Serbian responsibility for so much of the Balkan tragedy.

The problem with Rittersporn is that non-intervention in some cases does not justify non-intervention in all, and that an old order which let sleeping dogs lie and ethnic cleansers kill is not better than a new order which, imperfect though it may be, is less willing to do that. He is right to criticize double standards and humanitarian claims, but wrong to accept the false logic of what Michael Ignatieff calls "moral perfectionism" (since we did the wrong thing before, let's be consistent and do it again). And the social order in which "no one can sleep quietly" is not the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new one in which killers (from Pinochet to Pol Pot) can be held accountable beyond their borders and after their crimes, but the old one which let the neighbor beat his wife to death in the back yard in broad daylight while others respected his privacy and minded their own business. The fact is that genocidal killers sleep less quietly today than ever before. And if that is not progress, what is?

The problem with Piccone is that he has only learned half the lesson of Auschwitz (that global action to "defend particular communities" can be morally justified) and not the other half (that this is only philosophically possible in terms of some idea of universal human dignity and rights). That is, after all, why Auschwitz racism led to UN universalism, and how the UN's dual (and contradictory) mandate makes it different from the old League. For the League founders, the lesson of WWI was about collective security (for national sovereignties), but for the UN founders, in the shadow of the Holocaust, there was a second lesson as well, about universal rights (beyond national sovereignties). There can be no purely particularist critique of particularist evil. And the practical test of this is a simple question. Obviously, global affairs reflect complex forces and different agendas. But why rescue Albanians (or anyone else) from ethnic cleansing, if not because it violates some principle of universal rights that we now care more about because of the genocide against the Jews ? Only that makes it not just a local issue. But particularism is inherently local, and Piccone's valid critique of some aspects of liberal universalism remains trapped within a tribalistic critique of tribalism. Yet, any moral defence (as opposed to sociological explanation) of NATO in Kosovo (including Piccone's theme that, whatever national agendas may be, helping "particular communities" to be "left alone" is morally superior to letting them be killed) ends up invoking some kind of post-Auschwitz universalism. For how else do "particular communities" have any right not to be wiped out? The defence of "particular communities" as grounds for intervention is an "explanation" which itself needs to be explained in terms of new norms about human rights. Armenians who were wiped out lived in less fortunate times. Africans who were enslaved would not have had philosophical debates about the moral claims of abolitionists. And today, around the world, victims of police states which de-construct human bodies are grateful that Amnesty International has not been taken over by French philosophy students who want to de-construct human rights. Of course, there are no Archimedean points in human affairs, but there are definite historical stages, and we have reached a point in time where morally, ecologically and in others ways as well, new norms have some kind of Archimedean leverage. From the US soldiers who opened the doors of Bergen-Belsen, to the framers of the UN Charter, and the heroic journey of Nelson Mandela, who knew in all those long years in prison that he was not alone and forgotten in some purely local problem, the world has changed.

But what, then, of the Swiss case ? Could Piccone reply that this is, in fact, a convincing example of a particularist alternative to particularist evil ? Isn't that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what is implied by my themes of "rightless democracy" and "neighbourly pacts"? Isn't that what the three cantons did in 1291 — defend particular communities, but without abstract rights? Lessons of Auschwitz aside, is the problem perhaps that I have not properly learned the lessons of Uri?

It is true that the Swiss system has little over-arching universalism. But the bottom line is that it is a liberal Western democracy, with citizenship rights, market freedoms, the rule of law, and so forth. It is not the Iroquois Confederacy. It is not a system of federal populism. It is a system of liberal federalism. But the Swiss case does counter any simple assertion of rights. Perhaps the lessons of Auschwitz and the lessons of Uri can be combined into one: the defence of particular communities is greatly reinforced by, but not totally dependent on the idea of universal rights. The new global culture of human rights has some progressive leverage, but it is not the only way to a safe neighbourhood.

Interestingly enough, this combination is perhaps symbolized by Geneva itself. In one of those ironic twists of history, rights-minimalist Switzerland becomes the international headquarters of human rights. This strange mix is all within walking distance in Geneva — from the Reformation Wall in the Old Town (with its modest narrative of unspectacular events) to the grand Palais des Nations (old seat of the League, and now European base of the UN, whose long Egyptian-style halls still echo with the futile pleas of Haile Selassie for help against Mussolini), from the old lake steamers plying their way toward the foothills of the Bernese Oberland and the valleys of 1291, to the imposing edifice of the International Labor Organization, whose long record in labor rights continues now, in 1999, with a new convention against child slavery. The peasants of 1291 could protect themselves. But not everyone can.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews:

The Dialectic of Enlightenment and the "Dark Continent"

Russell A. Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 270pp.

Russell Berman has written a fascinating book about *space* and *alterity* in colonial discourse. The book has a Eurocentric focus: the time and world Berman discusses were Eurocentric. So, too, was the Enlightenment, and Berman explicates the encounter between European voyagers and non-European peoples in terms of the "dialectic of enlightenment." As a device, this works well. It allows a unity of focus in an otherwise varied assortment of topics. As he writes, his book is "neither a history of German colonialism nor an intellectual history of images of non-Europeans in German literature," but a look at "some specific cases in which Germans (sometimes alone, sometimes with others) traveled into that non-European world, gradually coming under the sway of European power" (p. 8).

The question arises: why Germany? England was the greater imperial power, and Berman has occasion to contrast the German with the English experience. The obvious answer would be that Berman is a Germanist. But he has a better answer: "Within colonial discourse, German material is of particular interest, not because of the significance of German colonialism per se, but because of Germany's own liminal situation — never quite a full-fledged European nation-state, never indisputably part of the modern West" (pp. 134-35). By "colonial discourse," Berman means "the linguistic articulation of the process through which non-European cultures were integrated into a European system of administration" (p. 8), and he claims that "German colonial discourse is interesting because it is different from the more emphatically universalizing claims of British and French colonial discourses" (p. 10). It is this marginality which allows the German experience to shed light in dark places.

Berman is critical of facile critiques in contemporary academic discourse, which derive from "an unresolved evaluation of the legacy of the Enlightenment: as being fully complicitous in structures of power and control, including colonialism, or as the only frame available with which credible criticisms of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

power and control can be maintained" (p. 7). The rhetoric of anti-Eurocentrism marks the period of "post-colonialism," and he asserts that "the appropriation of anti-Eurocentrism as a theoretical and (sometimes circular) position in the United States is deeply problematic" (p. 16). Furthermore, as "Europe too is remapped by the processes of imperialism, and if this remapping includes decenterings — between West and East, center and periphery — then anti-colonial accounts of a centered and monolithic Europe threatening the rest of the world are sorely inadequate. Such post-colonial fantasies of 'Eurocentrism' ignore the dramatic diversities within Europe, just as they refrain from inquiring into the way similar processes of cultural transformation operate in European and non-European contexts" (p. 67). Here Berman carries his critique of current cultural criticism too far. Whatever the diversities within Europe, particularly during the age of "high imperialism," Eurocentrism is not a "post-colonial fantasy."

Berman divides what he calls the "imperial era" into three parts: the "age of discovery," during which European voyagers organized global space into a single cartographic system; the "age of high imperialism," marked by the direct political domination of much of the globe by a small number of European states; and the "post-colonial era," which is characterized by some political independence and considerable economic dependence. At times, he clearly distinguishes between colonialism and imperialism, as when he writes about "the tension between an Enlightenment universalism that provides a norm of egalitarianism and the keen understanding of a really existing politics of domination. This tension characterizes the transitional period of the mid-nineteenth century, when enlightened ideals were still near enough to exercise influence while the brutality of extraterritorial domination was increasingly recognized as part of a modern present" (p. 72). This was precisely the "transitional period" between colonialism and imperialism, and the dividing line was the "scramble for Africa." During the age of colonialism, which corresponds to the time during which the international law of the *jus publicum Europaeum* was in force, the world was Eurocentric. That Eurocentrism began to collapse with the onset of imperialism.

Berman argues that his title, "Enlightenment or Empire," is "poised ambivalently around the double meaning of the conjunction, suggesting simultaneously an alternative (a choice) and an equivalency." (p. 6). Elsewhere, he says that "[t]here is no explanatory value in trying to squeeze the history of colonialism into the frame of a cheap melodrama between an evil Reason and an idealized Other, cast as an innocent victim and tied up on the railroad tracks of progress" (p. 136). The problem here is again the failure to distinguish between colonialism and imperialism. He does say that: "For the analysis of colonial discourse, the question is one of space, not race" (p. 3). This is in accord with Carl Schmitt's approach in his book on the age of the *jus publicum Europaeum* and the *nomos* of the earth.[1]

1. See Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), 2nd. ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the key question for imperialism is not only space, but also race, and almost the whole of Berman's book is concerned with the "scramble for Africa," which did not begin until the latter part of the 19th century.

What Berman describes as the "dialectic of enlightenment" is at work in "colonial discourse." It is also at work in imperial discourse, but the context is different. During colonialism, there was a difference between European policies at home and "beyond the line" — that notorious slogan that marked where European law ended and a kind of no-man's land began. The European encounter with the "Dark Continent" changed all that. Not only did the international law of the *jus publicum Europaeum* collapse with the onset of imperialism and the "scramble for Africa," but the line separating European and non-European soil disappeared. So also did the foundation of the European state and the consciousness of a common European law. This turn to an abstract universalism had repercussions both internally and externally, both economically and politically.

As John Hobson wrote: "Though, for convenience, the year 1870 has been taken as indicative of the beginning of a conscious policy of imperialism, it will become evident that the movement did not attain its full impetus until the middle of the eighties . . . from about 1884."[2] Schmitt characterized the Congo Conference held in Berlin (November 1884-February 1885) as the last European land-appropriation (*Landnahme*) of non-European soil, as the "last bloom of the *jus publicum Europaeum*."[3] Although Schmitt also did not always distinguish clearly between colonialism and imperialism, he did say that in any discussion of colonialism one should not exclude mention of "brutal imperialism, atavistic criminality, and a sadistic opposition to progress." But, more to the point, he observed during the Cold War that, despite all remaining ideological antitheses, "the leading world powers of the West and the East are united in their rejection of colonialism. *In concreto*, colonialism here means the land- and sea-appropriations of the age of great discoveries of the four hundred years of Eurocentric international law. The odium of colonialism today concerns European nations. At its core, it is nothing other than the odium of appropriation. In this repudiation, progressive liberalism and Marxist communism agree completely." Furthermore: "The great work of the Spanish conquistadors has become a judgment of condemnation that is true of European colonialism as a whole. . . . the odium is universal; it is dominant in America, Asia, Africa, and even Europe. It is based on a profound change in social and economic-ethical concepts. However, it began with the centuries of propaganda against the Spanish *conquista*. The 'black legends' by which the *conquista* should be deprecated have fallen to its originators and exploiters. Today, there are Europeans asking

2. See John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), 3rd. ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1948).

3. Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to be forgiven for the heroic acts of their forefathers, in order to remove the burden of guilt for the odium of colonialism."[4]

Berman clearly recognizes that 19th century colonialism was by no means a direct continuation of the *conquista*. Here, however, he includes a curious argument that the self-legitimation of 19th century colonialism "derived from a dramatic post-Enlightenment reorganization of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism" (p. 107). Allegedly, the refusal of Christianity to direct its missionary zeal at Jews as well as at Gentiles "represented an internal inconsistency that derived from the double character of Christianity as a universalizing religion and a state ideology, at least through the eighteenth century and — not only covertly — later." Supposedly, as an ideology functioning to establish the structure of political authority in hierarchical societies, Christianity found anti-Semitism "useful as a mechanism with which to identify perpetual outsiders in order to produce the illusion of a cohesive Christian community" (pp. 107-08). But it is Berman who is under the illusion of a cohesive Christian community. It is incorrect to speak of "Christianity" as a unity in this sense, as though all its forms, Catholicism and Protestantism in particular, subscribed to the same "ideology." Furthermore, there is no evidence that "Christianity" in any form ever adopted anti-Semitism as an official policy, whatever anti-Semitic results it may have produced. Berman concludes: "Anti-Semitic policies should therefore be regarded as consequences of a politicized and ideological Christianity rather than of Christian religiosity per se" (p. 108). But this is a distinction without a difference. The anti-Semitism of Hitler and the Nazis had other origins than Christianity. Even though many German "Christians" went along with Hitler, Karl Barth's "Confessing Church," as well as the martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhöffer and the "White Rose" among others, attest to the fact that anti-Semitism was not an official Christian policy.

Berman begins with an encounter that took place in March 1773 between European voyagers and a group of islanders at Dusky Bay, on what would become known as the South Island of New Zealand. The two voyagers, who left detailed records, were the English Captain James Cook and a young German, Georg Forster, who later became a leading author of classical German literature. As Berman writes: "the substance of Forster's *philosophische Reisebeschreibung* is the appeal to reason and human experience, whereas Cook's cartographic project of inscription traces an arbitrary mathematical order in an empty Cartesian space, erasing the materiality of previous experience" (pp. 34-35). At stake is "a differentiation within the Enlightenment between alternative rationalities, the object of one being the control and domination of nature — the fully mapped-out globe — the object of the other maintaining an interest in alternative regions of human experience" (p. 48). As for the "key issue for European colonialism," Berman argues that the spatial expansion of European power had, as a direct result, contact with other cultures, and not

4. Schmitt, "Nomos - Nahme - Name," in *Der Beständige Aufbruch: Festschrift für Eric Przywara*, ed. by Siegfried Behn (Nuremberg: Glock und Lutz, 1957), pp. 104-105.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always confrontational ones. Then he asks if these cultures, which would always and necessarily appear as local and particular by comparison with European universalism, would be granted a local legitimacy or would be denounced as less than universal and therefore less than rational. In Forster's case, the answer is clearly yes, while for Cook the cultural question is side-stepped. In the 18th century, mercantile enlightenment was concerned with mapping the world. In the 19th century, this concern gave way to founding territorial empires.

As a result of his confusion of colonialism and imperialism, Berman contends that "colonial violence" eventually turned into the proving grounds for new intra-European violence: "The German *Vernichtungskrieg*, the war of destruction, against the Hereroes of Southwest Africa provided the destructive temperament and racist vocabulary that would lead to the Holocaust." His point is to demonstrate "how extraterritorial violence is a continuation and transformation of the self-alienation of the West, its refusal to fulfill its own universalist promise by choosing instead to universalize violence" (p. 113). But here he is speaking strictly about the "scramble for Africa," and he quotes Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to good effect when she writes: "It is highly probable that the thinking in terms of race would have disappeared in due time together with other irresponsible opinions of the 19th century, if the 'scramble for Africa' and the new era of imperialism had not exposed Western humanity to new and shocking experiences" (p. 113). Rather than civilizing the Africans, Africa succeeded in uncivilizing the Europeans. "African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite."[5] The correlation is particularly instructive with respect to the collapse of the *jus publicum Europaeum*.

In his chapter on Gerhard Rohlfs, Berman tells us that one can investigate

---

5. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 206. The full impact of the African experience was realized first by leaders of the mob, like Carl Peters, who decided that they, too, had to belong to a master race. Arendt speculated that Peters might have been the model for Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1990). Cf. also George Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad in the Congo* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1973). First published in 1902, Conrad's novel was written in 1898/99, and reflects his own experiences in the "Congo Free State" that King Leopold of Belgium established in 1885. It remains the greatest portrait in fiction of the European "scramble for Africa." A recent book about the Congo, which also uses Conrad's novel, fills out the story: "Conrad's white men go about their rape of the continent in the belief that they are uplifting the natives, bringing civilization, serving 'the noble cause.' All these illusions are embodied in the character of Kurtz. He is both a murderous head collector and an intellectual, 'an emissary of . . . science and progress.' He is a painter, . . . a poet and a journalist, the author of, among other things, a 17-page report . . . to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. At the end of this report, filled with lofty sentiments, Kurtz scrawls in a shaky hand: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'." See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost, a Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998). According to Conrad: "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the proximity of science and power, universalism and parochialism in the accounts of two German witnesses to the British expedition to Abyssinia that transpired in the first months of 1868. The story begins with the failure of Queen Victoria to reply in a timely fashion to a cordial letter from Tewodros (Theodore), King of Ethiopia (Abyssinia): a history of colonialisms "might proceed from an account of Cook's willingness to embrace the islander at Dusky Bay to the Foreign Office's refusal to answer Tewodros' letter" (p. 75). The point here is that this is no longer Forster's world of universal reason and empathy, because the subject encounters a world of objects as a stranger without any promise of reconciliation. One response to this condition, says Berman, is the "preference for masks; another is belligerence, a further textual trace of alienation" (p. 92). The mask "splits the subject internally, the public is split horizontally, and here humanity is split into us and them, self and other, Europe and Africa" (p. 93).

When, in 1884, Rohlfs enters into the discussion concerning the establishment of a German protectorate in Southwestern Africa, he attacks British claims in the region "not as a critic of colonialism in general, but in the specially German mode of anti-colonial colonialism, the invocation of equality as the principle according to which European nations should divide up the world among themselves" (p. 103). In this respect, Rohlfs adopted an argument from the colonial age to assert Germany's right to participate in the imperial age. Here, Berman clearly understands the transition that occurs in the 1880s, but he remains a prisoner of his own concept of "colonial discourse." Describing the British defeat of Tewodros, Berman comments that "the disregard of communication, the contemptuous narrations, and the stupendous military imbalance — anticipates the full-fledged colonialism of the late nineteenth century" (p. 129). Whether or not "extraterritorial violence is a continuation and transformation of the self-alienation of the West, its refusal to fulfill its own universalist promise by choosing instead to universalize violence" (p. 113), this process began with the "scramble for Africa."

One of Berman's most interesting chapters is "Engendered Colonies," which examines two variants of gendering — the reproductive metaphors that structure the crucial German colonialist tract authored by Ferdinand Fabri, and the imagery of Africa within the gender theory of psychoanalysis. Fabri refers to the "motherland," i.e., the reproductive dynamo, as distinguished from a "fatherland," which refers to the legislative entity of the state. He also speaks of "daughter states," and Berman suggests that here colonialism is given a historical mission of holding the world family together. The assumption is that initially colonial territory is empty and therefore available for settlement. "This emptiness has a history that, despite Fabri, depends less on providential order than on a transformation of a figure of European thought. Compared to Forster's rich texture of a globe populated by experiential subjects, Cook's cartography already seemed relatively empty. . . . Nevertheless, the disenchanted void of Enlightenment travel through Cartesian space has little in common with the beckoning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

emptiness of the colonialist imagination — a seductive space waiting to be filled and capable of infinite expansion" (p. 145). Although Fabri's text, as Berman notes, betrays how ultimately inadequate arguments for colonialism drew on an underlying rhetoric of birth and motherhood, he argues that "Freud's theoretical elaborations rely at crucial points on metaphoric maps that are implicated in aspects of colonial discourse" (p. 145). This may well be true. But what Berman makes of this is another matter.

Berman claims that Freud undermines the politics of colonialism by pulling discourse into the texts of psychoanalysis, thereby transforming its metaphors into their opposites: "Psychoanalysis becomes the anticolonialism of the soul" (p. 146). Berman recognizes that this statement will face considerable resistance: in particular, concerning Freud's use of the metaphor of the "Dark Continent" as a designation of the sexuality of the adult woman. In fact, as meticulous as Berman's discussion of Freud's encounter with the "Dark Continent" is, it leaves this reader unconvinced that Freud ever had a critique of "colonialism" in mind. Nevertheless, given that this metaphor and Berman's deconstruction of it in Freud plays such a central role both in his chapter on "Engendered Colonies" and in the one following on the "Emancipation of Women," it is necessary to explain Berman's thinking, At the very least, he says that the image of the "Dark Continent" seems to indicate Freud's own admission that female sexuality lies beyond the scope of knowledge, i.e., it is a continent in which the light of science has not yet begun to shine. The metaphor is followed almost immediately by a recapitulation of the notion of penis envy. The "Dark Continent" is not solely the unknown, but the unknown awaiting penetration and exploration, colonialism and control. According to Berman, "Freud's apparent misogyny seemingly slides into the language of imperialism, as his own prose appears to draw attention to the character of psychoanalysis as a project of domination and authority" (P. 146).

But Berman's Freud has more on his mind than female sexuality. Not only does psychoanalysis refuse the transformation of female sexuality into an object of colonial administration as a "Dark Continent," it also "scandalizes the scientific logocentricity of institutionalized rationality by demonstrating the actuality of myth at the very center of civilized, modern life. The premodern is by no means solely past; the nonmodern is just elsewhere. In contrast, resisting this dialectic and occluding these connections, Europe itself turns out to be the Dark Continent, against whose obscurantism Freud promotes psychoanalysis as the project of Enlightenment" (p. 152). Not only does Berman suggest that Freud's engagement with colonialism is foremost in his destabilization of the "Dark Continent" metaphor, he asserts that "the adversarial construction of psychoanalysis as a critique of repressive power draws considerable sustenance from an anticolonial rhetoric of African resistance to Europe" (p. 154). For example, in his own interpretation of Hannibal, the African enfigurement in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and of Boabdil, the last Moorish king of Spain, Berman writes: "Freud's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

psychoanalytic project, as a project of emancipation, clearly permits the critique of familial authority (Oedipus) to slide into a critique of imperial power" (p. 155). Whatever the truth of the matter, this is no doubt a fascinating reading of Freud's lifelong fascination with the "Dark Continent."

The configuration of emancipation, Enlightenment, and colonialism (read: imperialism) is, as Berman reveals, particularly striking in the case of German women. In his chapter on the "Emancipation of Women," Berman focuses on the writings of Frieda von Bülow, whom he calls the first significant author of *Kolonialliteratur.* In her novels, and especially in her German East African novellas, the "colonies" appear as the privileged site of a reorganization of male and female identities. "Von Bülow's texts attempt to reconcile two reformist projects in the colonies: a reform of the colonial administration to make it more effective and a reform of Wilhelmine gender relations to modify their patriarchal character" (p. 179). In particular, she suggests that the set of practices associated with the establishment of a permanent settlement in Africa would benefit from a feminization of its administration. In some cases, her text could be considered positively Freudian: "In *Der Heilige von Kialmasi* von Bülow presents colonialism as the context for a male efeminization and, implicitly, for homoeroticism as the basis of colonial solidarity" (p. 187). Berman also interprets these texts as implicitly undermining their story lines. In Von Bülow's *Mlinga Goni*, for example, colonialism beckons to the woman trapped in a repressive marriage to participate in dimensions of society previously reserved for men. Implicit transsexualism is linked with inklings of miscegenation. Berman concludes: "Crossing genders, crossing races, crossing borders: the widening horizons of imperialism initiate processes of hybridization that tend to subvert traditional structures of identify. Colonial discourse explores borders and undermines them at the same time" (pp. 187-88).

Particularly interesting in this connection is the relation between "colonial fantasies and fascist fantasies," although here Berman's use of the term "fascism," meaning Nazism, is as problematic as his use of the word "colonialism," meaning imperialism. He mentions that Eugen Fischer, head of the Institute for Racial Hygiene in Berlin during the Third Reich, began his "scientific" career with a study of "bastards" in Southwest Africa, and Berman draws the conclusion that colonial anxiety about miscegenation might be seen as the genuine precursor of the Nuremberg laws, and that if sexual fantasies in "colonial discourse" anticipated the gynephobia of the fascists, it is in part "because colonialism represented the proving ground for fascism more broadly" (p. 201). Also in this connection, Berman suggests that colonial ideology generated the notion of "a self-enclosed world, which is the precondition for encountering outsiders as exotic, radically different, and, ultimately, incompatible and menacing" (p. 201). In this, he sees a radical reorganization of spatiality, thus separating this era from the one in which Cook and Forster made their voyage. Although Berman's focus is on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"colonial discourse" rather than "colonial" practice, it is clear that there is an inherent relation between them.

Berman's last chapter confronts the anti-Eurocentrism of post-colonial thought in much of contemporary cultural criticism. He mentions specifically Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, both of whom blame reason for "colonialism." In this case, logocentricity and imperialism become indistinguishable, the rejection of Western metaphysics becomes a *sine qua non* for dismantling colonialism, and the postcolonial setting, properly understood, is subsequent to established structures of Western thought. "If Enlightenment and Enlightenment intellectuals make colonialism, then colonialism can only be undone by doing away with Enlightenment rationality and its cerebral purveyors: off with the heads" (pp. 204-5). The *locus classicus* for any discussion of the relation between Western culture and Western colonies is, according to Berman, Jean-Paul Sartre's 1961 introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Here Berman closely examines the representation of colonialism within the rhetoric of Sartre's anticolonialism, and concludes: "The attack on the Enlightenment ends up as a turn to myth, the myth of anticolonialism. It is not the real practice of anticolonialism in the political culture of the Algerian revolution nor the substance of Fanon's argument that is at stake here but anticolonialism as an aspect of Sartre's position and its relevance to a judgment on intellectuals and European thought" (p. 206). Whereas Fanon is addressing his African compatriots without regard to a European readership, Sartre directs his remarks specifically to European intellectuals. He sketches a history of colonialism, beginning with a so-called "golden age," through an awakening of the colonized population to consciousness, and then to resistance, violence and emancipation. He sees Europe facing an impending catastrophe. "She's done for," he writes, and Berman comments, "as if the catastrophe of fascism and the Holocaust had not already taken place — and to convince his readers (as distinct from Fanon's) to support and join the anticolonial revolution" (p. 207).

Berman sees a similarity in the rhetoric of colonialism and anticolonialism, which explains its "myth." For example, he writes that both Fabri and von Bülow, prime exponents of 19th century German colonial discourse, justified the colonial mission by the desire to surpass idealism, which is hardly different from Sartre's activism: "On this score at least, then, colonialism is just as postintellectual as existentialist anticolonialism, which in turn points to the political inappropriateness of Sartre's attack on Enlightenment idealism. Although he and subsequent thinkers blame 'the Word,' that is, conceptual thinking, and the Enlightenment for colonialism, it is perfectly clear that colonialism depended on precisely the same anticonceptualism and anti-idealism as does Sartre" (p. 214). Even here, gender plays a role, since Sartre personifies Europe as a "sick woman," and says that Fanon, as a doctor, "certifies that she is dying, on external evidence, founded on symptoms that he can observe." As Berman notes, Sartre

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

does not give a damn whether she lives or dies, because the real goal is the "new man." Not only does he frame this new man's emergence with misogynous figures of the "massacre of women and children," but the socialist metaphor of the revolution as birth pangs is transformed, and, as Berman interprets it, "anticolonialism becomes a male fantasy of violence with an unambiguously gendered program for masculinist freedom" (pp. 217-18).

Such simplistic anticolonialism as Sartre's, as well as Derrida's equation of logocentricty and domination, Enlightenment and empire, have proved sorely inadequate for analyzing the cultural and political complexities of hybridization in contemporary discussions about cultural plurality and difference. Berman concludes that the establishment of European empires required, on the one hand, the accumulation of scientific knowledge, and, on the other, the practical needs associated with seizing control of new territories. Moreover, the ability to administer them soon demanded a different sort of knowledge as well: detailed and emphatic familiarity with the colonized peoples. No matter how ideological this knowledge may have been, some understanding, beginning with the local language and extending to local customs, must have been crucial. In other words, for the colonial administration, there was a need to retreat from any consistent and abstract universalism in order to ascribe some validity to the particularity of a given culture. The choice is then not between universalism and localism or universalism and provincialism, but between two universalisms: one abstract and theoretical, committed to general principles and immune to local differences; the other, realistic and empirical, finding the principle or rationality in the given materials of particular cultures, all characterized by difference.

Berman concludes that: "At the beginning of the century, colonialism posed important challenges to European culture, its intellectuals and its artists. Yet the issues bore considerable similarities to our contemporary concerns at the century's end: the imperative to rethink horizons, practices, and structures of thought and to integrate into the ongoing processes of cultural modernization the real experience of engagement with the world beyond Europe" (pp. 236-37). Whether Berman realizes it or not, this is a Eurocentric argument, and, in view of the current academic fad of "multiculturalism," it is the only one that makes sense.

G. L. Ulmen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Obsolescence of Utopia

Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Policy and Culture in the Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 236 pp. + xiii.

The subtitle of Jacoby's book, "Politics and Culture in the Age of Apathy," aptly captures the way the present American political situation is usually perceived. Unlike conventional wisdom that celebrates this state of affairs as the achievement of genuine consensus, Jacoby bemoans it as an indication of general confusion: the result of the exhaustion of radical alternatives and a collapse of those utopian visions that generate political projects. The evidence seems compelling. Any cursory survey of the kind of issues being articulated by the various presidential candidates positioning themselves for the November 2000 elections supports this diagnosis. In a country in the midst of unprecedented prosperity, the only questions that seem to matter concern the amount and quality of services the state is expected to provide. Vacuous slogans, such as "reinventing government" or "compassionate conservatism," immediately convey the paucity of new ideas offered to an electorate seemingly uninterested in, and unwilling to entertain, anything threatening the stock market's steady growth. As for intellectuals, as Jacoby readily shows, extending a critique he has developed in several earlier books, they ran out of gas even before the economy heated up in the early 1990s.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the final delegitimation of the "communist" alternative as a new mode of domination by a new class of political *apparatchiki* even more exploitative than the old capitalists, seems to have had a devastating impact on the imagination of what remains of the American Left and its liberal fellow-travelers. Despite routine dismissals of the Soviet experience as an aberration, rather than a paradigm, of socialism, the sudden deflation of critical perspectives after the USSR's collapse documents the extent to which it was the real model for most radical projects. The various utopian visions developed during the past two centuries were but different versions of the same general socialist model of the Enlightenment's reformulation of the quest for emancipation transubstantiated into and reduced to exclusively economistic terms. All routine criticisms of the authoritarian flaws of "really existing socialism" ultimately were meant to salvage the concept of a not-yet-existing socialism as a still-viable utopian vision — something that would eventually triumph after conditions of economic and cultural backwardness were eliminated during the heroic process of "building a socialist society." The *way* the Soviet Union collapsed — as a result of its inability to adjust to new technological realities, deal effectively with corruption and, most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of all, because the "new socialist man" it created was not the beaming, energetic and self-confident ideal projected by official agitprop, but an increasingly state-dependent Oblomov mired in nihilism and consumerism — brought down much more than merely another repressive bureaucratic regime ruling over an unmanageable empire. It meant the beginning of the end of the project of modernity, which dates back to the French Revolution and lingers on by default, pending the development of viable alternatives.

One of the less relevant epiphenomena of this unexpected state of affairs has been the transformation of whatever utopian ideals had survived the decline of the New Left in the early 1970s into what Jacoby describes as ideological fig-leafs for academic opportunism and careerism. What remains of the Left today, mostly barricaded in ever more politically marginalized ivory towers, no longer dares to propose anything beyond the fine-tunings of the present system or, at best, to recycle various versions of a "Swedish model," bankrupt everywhere, including Sweden. According to Jacoby, the end of utopia is the last stage of a journey "from utopia to myopia." All that really seems to matter today are the very same lures of consumerism that for decades were routinely indicted as terminally crass and philistine. The implication is that this disappearance of utopian visions helps explain the otherwise contradictory phenomena of widespread confusion and despair in the midst of unprecedented abundance, technological wonders and seemingly unlimited possibilities.

The End of which *Utopia?*

This turn of events marks the exhaustion of the revival of that brand of radicalism which began in the 1960s. At that time, the rise of the New Left caught by surprise not only the general public, but most of all those "end of ideology" advocates, from Raymond Aron to Daniel Bell and Seymour Martin Lipset, who, in the late 1950s, had been celebrating the dawn of a new era, free of major social conflicts. Shortly after Khrushchev's famous denunciation of the horrors of Stalinism and the widening of the Sino-Soviet split, they summarily dismissed radicalism in general, and communism in particular, as doomed. All intellectuals could do, according to that generation of social critics who came to be known as "the sunshine boys," was to improve a capitalist system no longer challenged by any serious alternatives. Then came the New Left. Yet, contrary to various inflated claims for liberation from all forms of oppression, many of which had not yet even been properly formulated at the time, over thirty years later it is clear that the New Left managed merely to obliterate whatever credible ideals the Old Left claimed to advocate — at least in its more successful ideological agitprop: rationality, objectivity, equality, truth, universality, etc. Far from calling for the system's overthrow or radical modifications, the overwhelming majority of new "dissidents," from feminists to gays and ecologists, etc. now merely want "in" the predominant social system. The current obsession with inclusiveness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and tolerance is only the other side of the end of utopia. It reflects the realization that, since there is only one game in town, everyone should be allowed to play it, no matter what unintended consequences may result.

Discredited as the outlook of a particular group of "dead white males," the Old Left's "logocentrism" gave way to a fashionable new relativism. Now embraced by most ex-1968ers, this relativism flattens out all values as equally arbitrary and socially constructed, resulting in a generalized nihilism barely concealed behind a glorification of hedonism. Worse yet: unlike in the old Hegelian dialectic, where "the negation of the negation" results in a higher synthesis rather than in the mere reaffirmation of the original state of affairs, the dawn of what Jacoby describes as "the end of the end of the end of ideology" does not seem all that different from the predicament of the late 1950s, when all problems were deemed amenable to technocratic solutions and politics was relegated to mere administrative decisions concerning which team of politicians would better manage the shop — something resembling the stockholders' periodic elections of the company's board of directors. Today, it is only a matter of the *size* of the tax cut, the *amount* of federal aid for education, the *level* of the minimum wage, *how long* one should wait before buying a gun, etc. The *quantitative* dimension seems to have checkmated all *qualitative* considerations out of the political picture

Unlike in the 1950s, however, when most political leaders at least had some confidence in the kind of solutions they proposed, today both the establishment and its critics seem to be in a state of deep confusion concerning not only the present state of affairs, but also what would constitute "the good society." Even the old *via negativa* of explaining away practically every problem in terms of particular scapegoats seems not to work anymore. Of course, there are the routine, inflated forebodings concerning the infamous "New World Order." On closer scrutiny, however, this allegedly diabolical capitalist master-plan to control the whole world turns out to be nothing more than the projection and further rationalization of a geopolitical state of affairs that, with the exception of the political disturbances caused by what, for a while, pretended to be a "Second World," has obtained at least since the end of WWII. All this grandiose plan seems to call for is the further removal of whatever obstacles remain on the path to the indefinite extension of market relations. Its ritualistic demonization by the Left remains predicated on an updated globalization of old prejudices, never convincingly substantiated, concerning capitalist greed as the *fons et origo malorum*.

But this worn-out, vulgar-materialist theodicy cannot explain post-communist realities. No matter how much it can manipulate human needs and the demand it generates for the kind of highly profitable luxurious junk it produces, capitalism can only thrive by persuading gullible consumers who always retain the option of *not* buying particular commodities or living well-advertised life-styles. The market's malfeasance is possible only after the successful weakening of all other cultural barriers. Whether the fading Left — and now even the paleoconservative

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Right, which is increasingly taking up many traditionally New Left positions against capitalism and globalism — realizes it or not, the wooden imperialism typical of the 19th century has long since become obsolete. The universalization of the new "American way of life" no longer requires either missionaries or the Marines: as it turns out, the market has proven itself an immensely more effective agency. Today, relations of dependence on Wall Street and Silicon Valley are not the result of the coercive imposition of any New World Order, but merely a function of meeting the demands of all-too-eager new clients — even in Serbia, Chechnya, Kurdistan and other seemingly recalcitrant regions still embroiled in bloody ethnic squabbles and pretending to seek radical alternatives to the predominant state of affairs. The culture industry has long since done its job in effectively consumerizing collective consciousness both domestically and internationally, independently of what particular values people hold. Yet, this homogenization of taste does not mean a concomitant homogenization of values and beliefs. Inuits can drink Coca-Cola and Talibans drive Mercedes without necessarily having to buy into "the American way of life" or Arian mythology. After all commodities have been sold and all profits tabulated, the question of values and goals is not automatically solved. It does not even have to resurface, since it has been running in the background all along, forgotten and repressed.

While *The End of Utopia* does as good a job as one can expect in vindicating the utopian vision of the best sectors of the Old Left, it ends up providing a rather naive explanation for the decline of radicalism — even as pure vision. In the end, Jacoby's diagnosis boils down, as in his earlier works on *Dogmatic Wisdom* and *The Last Intellectuals*, to the critical intellectuals' failure of nerve and/or their hypostatization of self-interests over and above those of society as a whole. What is left unexamined, but remains crucial for any explanation of the current political predicament, is the question whether earlier generations of critical intellectuals — and the Left in general — actually provided any *qualitatively* different alternative to the predominant system or articulated fundamentally different values. In fact, both the establishment and most of its critics have operated throughout the modern era within the same general axiological horizon: that of the Enlightenment. As marginal critics, such as Martin Heidegger and some members of the early Frankfurt School argued in vain, since their ideas have been either deactivated and mainlined within conformist academic discourse or ignored altogether, the US and the USSR, the organized capitalist and the bureaucratic collectivist systems, were closer than generally assumed. They were theoretical cousins squabbling over details. Thus, despite its immense cost, the entire Cold War saga was really about which system could better deliver the bacon, independently of any loftier ideals, long since privatized and dismissed as personal idiosyncrasies or, in typical Enlightenment fashion, as "superstition and myth." Ultimately, all the various post-Enlightenment utopias, whose decline Jacoby bemoans, were nothing but "new and improved" versions of the same

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dreaded and despised bourgeois model, whether regulated by a central plan or by well-modulated "autonomous" market forces. The "new orders" advocated in various ways by both the Left and the Right were never clearly spelled out as anything but slightly different idealizations of the existing state of affairs.

In this sense, the real end of utopia is not merely a function of the collapse of Left ideals, but the exhaustion of that bourgeois project of enlightenment that, at least since the French Revolution, has embodied Western civilization's teleology. What, from a standard "progressive" perspective presupposing the vanguard role of radical intellectuals, appears as a failure of nerve, could have been predicted, given the very nature of intellectuals as a class. From the very beginning, intellectuals were part of a largely post-enlightenment social formation whose interests were inextricably embroiled with the fate of the nation-state. The blow dealt to statism by the collapse of the USSR's bureaucratic centralism — an immensely more barbaric and clumsy version of that same welfare state still predominant in the West — has weakened and discredited central planning and political *dirigisme*. The subsequent, threatened disintegration practically everywhere (from Yugoslavia, Russia and Czechoslovakia, to Italy, Canada and Spain), of the social foundation it created to legitimate itself — the nation — has deprived intellectuals of their main agencies for implementing whatever utopian projects of social reconstruction they may have happened to entertain.

Without homogeneous nations enjoying a broad consensus about fundamental values to support an effective state apparatus entrusted with steering and managing society, intellectuals — traditional, organic or otherwise — find themselves in precisely the free-floating state Mannheim described over half a century ago, with no particular standpoint and, more importantly, with no viable political institution to appropriate or at least influence. Unable to pretend any longer to represent the *truth*, now intellectuals find it difficult to conceal their real vocation. When all is said and done, they only represent themselves. Unlike in the past, however, when some criteria of public accountability were still operative, now they do not have to pretend to represent anything anymore. Barricaded in universities, they have deployed "professionalism" and "academic freedom" to checkmate any external scrutiny. It is no longer necessary even to justify themselves by constructing abstract utopias, whose advocacy would ratify their status. Thus, what Jacoby describes as the end of utopia is not so much a failure of imagination as the end of a fraud: the end of intellectuals pretending to be the high priests of collective emancipation. The displacement of the rule of capital and property (objectified subjectivity) by those of abstract knowledge (reified consciousness) marks the end of modernist intellectuals as utopian visionaries. As "professionals," now they cannot care less about "beauty," or "goodness." All that matters is the new and improved "American way": "take the money and run."

The present predicament of confusion and complacency among intellectuals, which the culture industry routinely projects on a traditionally inarticulate or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even "silent" population, can be explained not merely as a result of the intellectuals' failure to do their alleged job of monitoring society's values and *modus operandi*, but in terms of their growing awareness of the obsolescence of their pretense of seeking to bring about "the good society" within a "rational," depoliticized utopia. Rationalization means depoliticization, and depoliticization marginalizes all values under an allegedly neutral proceduralism concealing the rule of the administrative apparatus in charge of procedures. Legitimacy collapses into legality, and the rule of the new class becomes reified into normality. Why bother with utopias?

Yet, no society can remain viable if it obliterates fundamental values by reducing them to irrelevant private matters, while translating all social problems into administrative state business amenable to technocratic processing. The state does totalize the nation, but only by destroying that particularity and otherness necessary to constitute the citizenship required to sustain its institutional framework. Thus, the triumph of statism also spells its demise. What Jacoby describes as today's complacency and confusion are actually the symptoms of this state of affairs. The intellectuals' most recent post-Cold War retreat into what C. Wright Mills ridiculed as "crackpot realism" in reference to an earlier generation of "end of ideology" ideologues — the mere fine tuning of an otherwise insane state of affairs — has much more to do with the empowerment of intellectuals, either as neutral administrators or as unaccountable academics, and with a weakening of both the state and the nation, rather than with any failure of nerve. Unable to rely on state rationalization and national homogenization to deploy utopian projects, intellectuals do not bother with it any more, especially since they no longer need it to justify their *raison d'être*. Thus, traditional enlightenment utopias fade into the given, whose piecemeal manipulation remains the only viable political option. With no clue as to how to change the world or into what, intellectuals have now given up even trying to understand it. The point, apparently, is to enjoy it.

Jacoby's explanation for the decline of utopian thinking is inadequate. It is still too embroiled in that standard Enlightenment ideology of endless progress and emancipation spearheaded by a knowledge elite, whose terminal bankruptcy it implicitly rejects by reducing it to the shortsightedness of the present generation of intellectuals. It goes much deeper than that. Even if intellectuals were suddenly to forget the sad record of recent utopian efforts, which Jacoby seeks to sweep under the rug by blaming it on anti-utopians, and to rediscover the virtues of utopian constructions, it is unlikely that any "universal emancipation" would follow the new wave of social engineering. In fact, emancipation itself — a secularized version of an otherwise discredited Christian notion of salvation — rings increasingly hollow. A well-fed population with a computer on every desk and unlimited MTV on demand, does not a good society make. Utopian visions cannot reduce to variations of such a dismal prospect, and historically this has not been the case. Thus, the present predicament does not mark the end of *all* utopias (understood as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

visions of an ideal future whose realization is the task of current efforts), but only of a *particular* kind of utopia — one predicated on certified modernist assumptions and automatically discrediting all others as irrational, reactionary and evil.

From an alternative perspective, based on a much longer view of history than the one currently fashionable, which begins sometime in the 18th century, or with the scientific revolution, and dismisses whatever came before as the dark ages, politics and utopia have not disappeared. They subsist under subtle, but relentless repression, behind the official *Ideenkleid* woven by the mass media and establishment intellectuals, despite the fact that they are usually checkmated out of public discourse or reinterpreted as sheer irrationality or madness. The dialectic of enlightenment does recycle the same kind of superstitions and myths that were supposed to have been eliminated once and for all. Yet, contrary to Adorno and most of the Frankfurt School, which also remained caught within the very progressive eschatology they criticized, the myths to which the Enlightenment reverts do not necessarily lead to any specific outcome. Nazism and Bolshevism were only two possibilities. Some of the others — mostly predicated on religious traditions — are still capable of generating viable utopian visions, despite the fact that they usually turn out to be highly problematic, conflict-ridden, and incompatible with secular humanism, modernity, and the Enlightenment.

Far from disappearing once and for all into the this-worldliness of modernity, as assumed by Enlightenment thinkers from Marx to Weber and post-communist progressive intellectuals, today the transcendent dimension, which articulated practically all premodern utopian visions, is reasserting itself with a vengeance as an unerasable ontological horizon sustaining a plethora of what, from an enlightened viewpoint, appears as "politically incorrect" and therefore illegitimate, other-worldly worldviews. Unable to ground itself in long-since discredited modernist dogma, Enlightenment ideology now finds itself based on the same arbitrary epistemological terrain of "superstition and myth," where all pre-modern religious utopias have been banished. The acknowledgment of the socially constructed character of *all* conceptual frameworks allows for no exceptions: it undermines the universality and eternality of traditional dogma as effectively as it does even the most rigorous scientific constructs, whose legitimacy ceases to be grounded in "nature" or "divinity," which are not now, nor have they ever been immediately accessible through purely conceptual means, whose validity is ultimately and exclusively a function of persuasion.

The Perseverance of Forbidden Utopias

Along with well-publicized, parasitic demands for more centrally provided goods and services — encouraged by the administrative apparatus, because they automatically relegitimate the immense bureaucratic system necessary to deliver these goods and services — the more healthy call to be left alone by those active sectors of society not always able to have their views eloquently articulated is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

becoming one of the most recurring political issues. While, so far, all the renewed talk of federalism and decentralization has yielded practically no results, its intensity and persistence testifies to its growing relevance — despite the fact that it is invariably retranslated by intellectuals inextricably tied to the administrative apparatus into different versions of the same predominant mode of political domination. This is facilitated by the fact that prosperity tends to legitimate the status quo. However, it also provides more free space for alternative visions, not necessarily those sanctioned by "progressive" intellectuals, to ferment in the social woodwork, pending further delegitimation of the ruling ideology. Peculiar as they may have been, the Branch Davidians are increasingly coming to symbolize the problems and paradoxes generated by the resurgence of forbidden utopias, along with the obstacles encountered in the process of freeing society from the dogmatic implications of deeply-imbedded modernist shackles.

Any political analysis that fails to take this exhaustion of the modernist project into account ends up not only reaffirming it, but also systematically occluding political dynamics whose unexpected periodic manifestations are felt as a shock. Complaints about "the end of utopia," however, cannot really conceal the end of modernity. Notwithstanding immense technological advances and the attainments of levels of prosperity unforeseen even by the most optimistic visionaries in the last century, today there is little evidence of that "collective human emancipation" historically assumed, according to standard Enlightenment narratives, to be a natural epiphenomenon of economic abundance and material well-being. Even on its own ideological terms, the Enlightenment project is far from completed or even completable, as advocated by residual modernist ideologues. The awareness of this state of affairs nourishes the most diverse and often bizarre alternative narratives. Banished from politically-correct public discourse, forbidden utopias survive underground, ignored and unseen, except in the rare occasions when they are exterminated by federal agents or trotted out for ridicule by the culture industry and the mass media.

In the age of post-modernity and artificial negativity, the hegemony of the culture industry — now articulated both by the establishment's apologists as well as by its distinguished critics — is nowhere more obvious than in the way disturbing political issues are automatically mainstreamed, and thereby emptied of any problematic content, even before they manage to surface into public consciousness as "news." Those rare events whose political import is impossible to occlude are routinely redescribed in official representations within an Enlightenment narrative whose eventual trajectory is a foregone conclusion. Since fundamental political quandaries do not exist only in abstract theoretical elaborations, but, in a Leibnizian fashion, manage to resurface within every monadic event in the social landscape, forbidden utopias constantly pop out in the mass media, within the mundanity of everyday events.

Thus, a careful analysis of the front page of *The New York Times* on a typically

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slow summer day, when *Realpolitik* is temporarily on hold and space has to be filled with whatever marginally interesting domestic topics happen to stumble across the editor's desk, readily provides insight into predominant social and political conflicts — even if these conflicts have been successfully occluded or summarily dismissed as long since resolved. What transpires is not only the kind of "progress" that has been achieved in this century, but most of the clues necessary to grasp the political realities brewing beneath official culture industry representations, whose official invisibility creates the false impression that all would be well, only if there were more enlightened intervention by state-certified "experts." It also helps explain why it is only a particular kind of officially-legitimated utopia that has ended — and why its demise may not be altogether undesirable.

The Utopian Struggle Against the Windmills of Evolution

On August 12, of "all the news that's fit to print" on the front page of *The New York Times*, the Kansas Board of Education's new strategy to legitimate creationism and defeat defenders of the theory of evolution by bureaucratically modifying the kind of exams all students in the state must take in order to pass was printed on the upper right side, normally reserved for the day's "major event."[1] This seemingly bizarre decision by the Kansas creationists is not easy to decipher, not to mention any interpretation of it as animated by utopian impulses. Over seven decades after the Scopes Trial, which presumably established once and for all the superiority of science in general, and the theory of evolution in particular, over creationism and other religious accounts of the origins of life, it must come as a shock that the Kansas Board of Education, along with many more such agencies, both at the state and local levels, still insist in privileging literal interpretations of the Biblical account of Genesis, or at least regarding them just as persuasive as the overwhelming amount of evidence accumulated by evolutionary biology, paleontology and other related sciences since Charles Darwin's days.

On closer scrutiny, however, what this event reveals is not just the "backwardness" and "irrationality" of some minor Kansas officials, as a culture-industry-inspired reading leads one to assume, but lingering fundamental conflicts between a *liberal* central government and residual *democratic* practices — a conflict between the mandatory official line of the bureaucracy and the forbidden utopias of local yokels in Kansas. It also documents the inability of the predominant Enlightenment ideology to persuade through the kind of free discussion and

1. The upper left side was reserved for an even more unexpected story about a shooting in Los Angeles, in a Jewish community center, by someone "concerned with the decline of the white race" attempting "to send a message to America by killing Jews." Even Hitler, in his worst moments, never went that far in public, well before all the alleged "progress" achieved during the last half century, thanks to the endless government-sponsored sensitization of new generations of enlightened citizens into the glories of universal love and "siblinghood" — to use the new, gender-neutral language of compulsory emancipation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rational deliberation it considers sufficient to resolve all differences. Most important, it reveals fundamental flaws in what has come to be accepted as the liberal approach to public education and, more broadly, not only the problems encountered by the predominant secular humanism in developing utopian visions, but even in merely reproducing the given.

The *New York Times* article itself provides many of the clues for an alternative reading. When the reporter asked an advocate of creationism about his reasons for opposing the teaching of the theory of evolution, he was lectured about the evils of the nihilism it precipitates. According to Mark Looy, a member of "Answers in Genesis," a creationist group, the problem with the theory of evolution is that it teaches that: ". . . There's not meaning in life if we're just animals in a struggle for survival. It creates a sense of purposelessness and hopelessness, which . . . leads to things like pain, murder and suicide." In other words, the theory is perceived as threatening a way of life based on a transcendental utopian vision codified into an objectivist theological narrative which, however, is no longer consistent with most of what has come to be accepted as scientific knowledge over the last couple of centuries. Confronted with having to choose between their traditional way of life, based on old revelations and utopian myths promising eternal salvation, but presumably discredited by science — a way of life *predicated on an ideal otherworldly future*, which has historically insured effective social reproduction and the constitution of new generations of relatively strong, autonomous individuals — and an account of life based on solid scientific research, but which tends to engender nihilism and self-destruction, the Kansas creationists have opted for the former. It is as rational a choice as any, following the very same pragmatic logic whose deployment, in different contexts, results in the acceptance of, not only the theory of evolution, but any scientific theory in general.

Here, in their occasionally inarticulate way, the creationists identify an unresolved enthymemetic contradiction of liberal democracies in general and American society in particular: in order to thrive, a strong democratic society committed to allegedly neutral liberal values needs precisely the kind of citizens it can no longer produce through exclusively secular humanist means, but which can still be constituted by communities such as those totalized by fundamentalist Christian communities in Kansas. This paradox is never thematized along these lines and its periodic manifestations, such as the latest Kansas creationists' act of defiance, end up automatically redescribed as yet another Quixotic charge of provincial zealots against the windmills of science.

From this broader perspective, the creationists' reluctance to accept the theory of evolution no longer seems all that irrational. In deploying their local democratic prerogatives against the liberal mandates from the Department of Education in Washington, however, the locally-elected creationist members of the Kansas Board of Education make their case within their opponents' philosophical framework, thus conceding defeat before any meaningful discussion can even begin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Instead of casting their arguments within a pragmatic epistemology, according to which all scientific knowledge is instrumental and therefore has no bearing on any "truth" inaccessible through one-sided conceptual modes of intellection, creationists present the biblical narrative within the same positivistic and realistic framework in terms of which even the theory of evolution is impossible to defend — exactly as in the original Scopes Trial. As pointed out by another *New York Times* article three days later, as science, evolutionary biology only provides coherent and calculated interpretations, always subject to modification and falsification in view of future developments. This means that science makes no claim to any absolute "truth." When all is said and done, acceptance of the accounts it constructs is based entirely on pragmatic considerations: it provides the best available interpretation so far, and fits in with everything else known on the subject — precisely the same grounds that lead creationists to resist integrating the theory of evolution, *qua* absolute truth, into their general worldview.

Readings of the theory of evolution, and science in general, along instrumentalist lines — the only defensible ones, short of unwarrantedly hypostatizing them into something they never claimed to be — do not and cannot threaten any religious or mythological narratives. These narratives' alleged divine inspiration transcends the rational order science deals with and, formulated in terms of the historically-conditioned conceptual generalizations of a particular time, resist reinterpretations. In automatically translating their original metaphorical formulation into realist terms, these narratives eventually and unavoidably end up in contradiction with newer forms of viable instrumental knowledge. At any rate, the absolute "truth" provided by the "divine" dimension can never be challenged by any particular claim, scientific or otherwise, because of the terminal incommensurability of the human and the divine. They obtain on qualitatively different ontic and ontological levels.

The problem here is that a postmodern, pragmatic interpretation of the Bible, or any other sacred text, as providing a metaphorical narrative of a particular set of historical events describing the embodiment of an elusive "truth" transcending the merely conceptual dimension — a narrative which, in the case of the Bible, became foundational for Western civilization by claiming to integrate all other traditions within its universalism — threatens the very legitimacy of *organized* religion. The acknowledgment of its socially constructed character undermines religion's claim of privileged access to what transcends immediacy and the merely conceptual through its texts, traditions and practices. If the religious narrative takes a negative theology turn and forfeits its absolute, realist and objective status in favor of a more philosophically defensible pragmatic reading, it can no longer exercise the kind of unchallangeable moral authority by means of which for centuries it has compelled believers into adhering to a particular code of behavior. This kind of code must then find more mundane, consensual foundations. Lacking such transcendental authority, the community must be totalized by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other, exclusively secular means. This downgrading of religious practices, from direct mandates from divine sources to mere social conventions, generates the very same nihilistic predicament creationists see coming out of the objectivist interpretation of the theory of evolution provided by secular humanists. It also helps explain why, e.g., John Dewey's pragmatism began as a defense of a very rigorous brand of Protestantism, but within his own lifetime quickly degenerated into an apology for the rising welfare state ushered in by Progressivism and Roosevelt's New Deal — a degenerate liberal derivative, which gradually obliterated the privatized values it claimed to defend, in favor of a politically-correct secular humanism wallowing in hedonism and nihilism.

The complexity of the issues that apparently have triggered the Kansas creationists' revolt, but which constantly resurface in the guise of equally strange events, does not allow for any easy resolution. The conventional wisdom sponsored by the culture industry and enforced by the bureaucratic apparatus systematically discourages the articulation of the underlying problems along any but officially sanctioned lines. In the case of the Kansas incident, the fundamental problems it exemplifies, e.g., the antinomies of current educational practices and national administrative policies — the impossibility of deploying any *general* policy which would not, at the same time, embody a *particular* perspective — are hardly ever formulated clearly. While such a discussion would provide a perspective for a comprehensive analysis of what is causing havoc in American education, it would also destabilize existing relations of domination and raise disturbing problems. The inability of public education to deal effectively with the aesthetic-mimetic dimension of the pedagogical experience not only short-circuits the process of socialization, but undermines the very possibility of imagining anything other than mere extensions of what is, or what is officially legitimated as the predominant state of affairs.

From Plato to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Edmund Husserl, it has been generally acknowledged that formal instruction can transmit only part of the knowledge necessary to constitute healthy personalities and responsible citizens. That which cannot be taught through formal pedagogical practices is learned by other means. If these other means are inadequate or are destroyed, the educational process is short-circuited and the result is a kind of sub-individuality unable to participate in the participatory practices of responsible citizenship, to sustain democratic institutions or to envision qualitatively different futures. Unlike *paideia* or *Bildung*, which describe a process of formation whereby people become initiated into their culture not only through formal instruction but, more importantly, through the aesthetic-mimetic internalization of those traditions and social practices which cannot be captured conceptually, modern public education must limit itself solely to the teaching of *objective* knowledge.

Yet, only through aesthetic-mimetic participation in particular practices is it possible to internalize most of one's culture, i.e., that precategorical otherness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conceptual thinking (and formal instruction) necessarily excludes. This is the dimension of *doxa*, religion and values that public education in culturally heterogeneous societies cannot touch without threatening their very heterogeneity — something which, in the US, is constitutionally forbidden, even though the culture industry's erosion of relatively autonomous communities leaves public schools as one of the very few remaining agencies that can transmit any values and beliefs. Consequently, this part of education must be relegated to rapidly diapering private institutions. This educational division of labor, however, remains viable only as long as the private domain remains sufficiently strong. Any disruption of the balance between the public and the private by, e.g., public instruction taking over private functions, not only undermines the process, but also complicates the effectiveness of public instruction itself. In this sense, despite the crude and counterproductive character of their approach, the Kansas creationists' defense of their educational prerogative to transmit to their children their *particular* culture is ultimately meant to guarantee the effective reproduction of that private domain and thus, unwittingly, meet the preconditions essential for the viability of precisely that heterogeneous system they seem instead intent on undermining. It also constitutes their defense of the pursuit of a forbidden utopia — something allowed only formal legitimacy and prevented from becoming objectified into everyday life, despite the fact that it poses no substantial threat to the predominant secular humanism.

Decentralizing Utopia

Jacoby does not have much sympathy for unorthodox utopias. He unabashedly defends standard Western concepts of freedom and happiness against, e.g., the multiculturalists' and the relativists' inability to take a clear stand in seemingly obvious cases, such as the Rushdie affair. Difficult as it may be to argue against such a position, it does raise serious philosophical questions which cannot be skated over as easily as he does. Against opportunistic and self-serving academic vindications of "particularity," which routinely glorify what, from a standard Western perspective, appear to be abhorrent practices, he defends universals as necessary for clear thinking. He does not, however, pay enough attention to the kinds of problems they have raised during the last couple thousand years. From the dawn of Greek philosophy, it has never been a matter of "universals or no universals," but primarily of their *status*. With Marcuse, Jacoby follows the Platonic path and accepts their transcendent status. They simply are. They make life so much easier. The same goes for "truth": it is not up for debate. Thus, he cites a 1935 essay by Horkheimer as making the case once and for all, and moves on to bash the silly relativism of anthropologists advocating "ethnomathematics" and the *Social Text* editors for supporting a fraudulent cultural critique of science.

In a general philosophical framework solidly anchored in divine revelation such a position presents no problems (although it raises many more serious ones).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Jacoby does not seem to have much patience with religion, and any suggestion of the divine creation of universals would strike him at least as odd. So, if, as the Great Helmsman used to say, they do not fall from the sky or grow on trees, where do they come from? Are they part of the conceptual furniture of the universe? But, in that case, why are they not found everywhere and immediately available? Why can they not be regarded as mere human creations meant to capture what inevitably eludes them, as not only multicultural ideologues, but also a long lists of distinguished philosophers from Protagoras on have argued — which would help explain cultural differences without necessarily falling into relativism? Jacoby cannot bother with these questions, or else his book would have been ten times as long. Rather, he retreats behind common sense and vintage Critical Theory, and leaves it at that.

A more careful scrutiny of the sources Jacoby uses, however, reveals a fundamental vacuity. The Horkheimer essay he cites (p. 144) to legitimate the universality of truth does nothing of the sort. After meandering from negation to negation of inadequate attempts to grasp this truth, the essay *asserts* its absolute character, but, before spelling out what this means, it fades immediately into an exercise in the sociology of knowledge, whose only real truth has to do with how accurately particular positions reflect the objective economic interests of its defenders. Jacoby's subsequent unpacking of Marcuse's notion of "the great refusal" via Whitehead is even less enlightening. Not only it does not even broach the question of the ontological and epistemological status of truth other than by pointing out the gap between the real and the ideal, but it simplistically mainstreams the question within a new and improved Enlightenment framework.

The indictment of the inadequacy of the real and the particular implicitly legitimates the ideal and the universal, without inquiring into the status of the latter. Is it legitimate to question the legitimacy of some universals, or do they all pass muster in virtue of their status as "universals"? Presumably, a particular instance of phlogiston remains an approximation of the universal "phlogiston," while individual miracles only imperfectly exemplify God's omnipotence. As Lukács sneered at Husserl in *Existentialisme ou Marxisme?*, in connection with a similar uncritical assumption of the automatic validity of universals, even after the most careful phenomenological reduction of the devil, one is still left with a rigorous concept of . . . the devil.

At any rate, it remains unclear how a particular can reject a universal, without presupposing an alternative universal of which it would be an instance. Thus, the reader is left wondering how "a particularism that scorns universals inevitably ends by celebrating blood and race" (p. 150), especially since the particularism in question is predicated on a well-defined alternative set of universals. Aside from the fact that only very few — in fact only one — of the many societies based on territoriality and community have been Nazi, even the Southern League, that Jacoby explicitly cites (which may or may not engage in questionable practices,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

independently of the correctness of Jacoby's criticism) rejects only a specific kind of universal principles in favor of an alternative set: the primacy of concrete communities of people interacting face-to-face, in contraposition to arbitrary abstractions, such as "humanity" or "human rights," invented in the 18th century and instrumentalized ever since for all sorts of dubious political objectives having little to do with their manifest function.

Despite Adorno's quip, in referring to the concept's pretense to encompass reality, that the whole is the untrue, Hegel had it right the first time: the whole, understood as both the conceptual and the preconceptual, is the true. The only catch is that this whole is not accessible. The kind of elegant dialectical waltz Hegel traces out in *The Phenomenology* is only possible from the viewpoint of an already achieved absolute consciousness, which means that any totalization prior to the stage, as Lukács spelled it out in the opening pages of *History and Class Consciousness*, is, at best, a wild gamble — one Lukács had no trouble taking, on the way of becoming a Stalinist, and one Adorno did not, preferring instead to scoot back to the less grandiose formulations of Kant and Nietzsche. Thus, Jacoby's critique of the new, opportunist post-modern paladins of particularity overkills its prey: in the process, it relegitimates the ideological framework of an institutional totality, which is guilty of annihilating particularity, even if this particularity is not always worth salvaging.

If absolute truth is approachable only negatively, and universals cannot therefore be directly and unequivocally deduced out of it, then it may be wiser to guard against identity logic than simply to endorse the great refusal. The embarrassing trajectory of the latter, from a refusal to go to VietNam, to pharmaceutical epistemology (i.e., attempts to access truth through LSD), to politically-correct piecemeal reforms, to self-promotion, which Jacoby has documented all too well, may not be entirely a function of moral weakness. Rather, it may have to do with what was only a very one-sided refusal, which never followed the dialectic of enlightenment to its logical conclusions and ended up trapped in the abysmal conformism it imposes. In the early 1940s, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* stopped abruptly with the shocking recognition of a fundamental equivalence between WWII's warring parties and a plea for the defense of particularity and otherness against the homogenizing violence of "the domination of the concept." At the time, it would have been political madness to go beyond that. Although the mimesis it sought to vindicate as a way out promises the possibility of a radical alternative, Adorno never developed any kind of viable political philosophy. It is clear, however, that the mimetic impulse precludes the possibility of traditional Enlightenment mega-utopias predicated on social-engineering reality in accordance with identity logic — at least, any that are able to avoid the domination of the concept. At best, it may endorse various forbidden micro-utopias, many of which still thrive ignored or repressed in the official representations of a society terminally engaged in rationalization and homogenization — now even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by multicultural and pluralist means.

When all is said and done, the end of utopia that Jacoby describes may not be altogether undesirable, as long as the utopian impulse thrives and the future is not pre-structured by bureaucratic fiat or excogitated by frustrated academics. Jacoby wishes for more and, by default, attempts to recycle an idealized and sanitized Left vision. As a polemical weapon with which to clobber what still pretends to be a Left in the universities, the book is excellent. As a proposal for a renewal of radicalism, it does not rate as well. To the extent that its vision remains riveted to an idealized reconstruction of the recent past, against which it unwittingly measures the present, it comes across as a peculiarly anti-conservative conservative work. Too much Marcuse and not enough Adorno tend to result in a refusal to break with a dialectical tradition which, in order to thrive, requires periodic radical breaks.

Paul Piccone

Civil Society and its Discontents

John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Images* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 194pp.

For a variety of reasons, "civil society" has become a key term in modern political discourse. First, in the West, state control of the economy has gone so much out of fashion that radicals now seek to mitigate the effects of an untrammeled free market by relocating the possibility of peaceful collaboration within a domain that is neither simply that of negotiation between atomic individuals nor that of the central state. Second, in the East, there was a growing perception that what totalitarianism suppressed was not so much the private life of individuals, which is in principle ineradicable, but rather those aspects of socialization dependent on centralized direction.

Both these tendencies sought to resuscitate the 18th century notion of civil society — an elusive term encompassing all voluntary association, often concerned with public matters, extending all the way from local sport clubs to the free press. In addition, it denotes not so much organization as idioms of behavior characterized by civility; in other words, codes of formal manners and sophisticated, often ironic forbearance, owing nothing to the lure of the good.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Keane is undoubtedly one of the leading theoretician of civil society. He combines familiarity with contemporary political developments with a long-term historical perspective and a global awareness. In this new book, he seeks to counterbalance postmodern Western pessimism with optimism about the prospects of civil society derived primarily from the Czech experience. Of course, the risk here is of falling in love with the naive hopes of historical latecomers, in order to regenerate the West's flagging political middle age. What is unclear is whether this optimism in the East will be able to survive the experience of capitalism.

In a series of essays, Keane outlines both the advantages and disadvantages of the tradition of civil society. On the positive side, it can be seen as a way of securing peace in an inevitably pluralistic world, without recourse to naked state intervention. On the negative side, Keane appreciates Norbert Elias's realization that codes of civility are the other side of the state's imposition of a purely formal order and its monopoly of violence. He shows how such a thesis is extended by Zygmunt Bauman to show how civility is consistent with totalitarian horror. Yet, for reasons unknown, Keane insists on the positive possibilities of civil society.

A clear and reasonable point is his attempt to distance the notion from nationalism, seen as a source of intolerance, and his endorsement of a Europe of regions regulated by a central power. This is fair enough. But it fails to acknowledge that, if the formality of civility is linked to a monopoly of violence by a power not committed to any substantive good, then a supra-national authority might be as dangerous or even more dangerous than a national one.

Nor does Keane ever resolve the contradictions between the supposed pluralism of civil society and its clear link to an all-pervasive state authority which, in a Foucauldian manner, no longer needs to operate through explicit mechanisms. The point here is that the kind of plural bodies civil society admits are no threat to the state, or else secretly supportive of it: the sport club is indeed typical, as is the supposedly free press. One could also cite the free organization of religious belief, seen as solely concerned with peoples' private salvation. Keane does not distinguish between this kind of pseudo-pluralism, permitted by civil society, and a more genuine pluralism of decentralized organicism (consisting of different bodies allowed real autonomy predicated on different visions of the good as, e.g., the co-existence of different religions in Spain in the early middle ages). Keane's remarks concerning the Islamic scholars' embrace of civil society, in opposition to totalitarian secular rule promoting the free market, are among the most interesting in his book. Yet, he does not realize that, in this case, civil society does not denote a genuine pluralism: in these Islamic scholars' vision, a tacit, rather than enforced dimension of social cohesion depends on a shared vision of God upholding natural justice.

Although Keane does not say so, this is a far cry from his own notion of civil society. He is right to insist that civil society must comprise the economic realm, but it is hard to find where he qualifies an untrammeled rule of the search for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

profit. He enunciates no principles whereby this might be achieved, and his approach appears one-dimensionally political (rather than economic or social), in such a fashion that he hovers abstractly above contemporary reality. Of course, those Marxists who denigrated civil society were wrong. But this does not alter the fact that really-existing civil society operates entirely in the interests of the wealthy, espousing bourgeois norms and with access to bureaucratic power.

Often, non-civil modes of behavior implicitly contain interesting critiques: the polite is not the good, yet Keane seems to think it is. These shortcomings are especially glaring in the only chapter which ventures specific practical proposals, i.e., the one on publicity (p. 157ff). Here, he seems resigned to the collapse of public service broadcasting, and he views positively the emergence of a far more plural media. Yet, the shared programs of the BBC, although common to all, did offer a medium between private life and the operations of the state. By contrast, what is known about the Murdoch-dominated media suggests that pluralism in public broadcasting produces enormous conformity across apparent difference, and increasingly confines access to high culture to a small minority that can pay for it. With the loss of any notion of what is good for peoples' self-development, the mass of people is left open to naked exploitation of their worst instincts.

Thus, the real weakness of Keane's book is that, without any notion that there might be a real shared common good, one is delivered over to a Rorty-type pragmatism that can only legitimate either the free contractualism of the market or bureaucratic manipulations. These are the two basic options in the 20th century, which on the surface seem to operate in tension, although, at a deep level, collaborate with each other. Here, civil society is no genuine third way. All it does is reinforce both the market and the state through codes of politeness and innocuous, yet sinister clubs for the successful. Keane seems to be searching for something more than this. But civil society is not the right rubric under which to search. What is needed here, instead, is to reach back before modernity (which includes civil society), to a framework that can bind people together in an orientation to the eternally good. Such a framework would fuse the ritual and the mythic, by reflecting consistently, and not without plausibility, on the human situation, while at the same time recognizing that, to achieve a basis for action, one must risk a mythic understanding exceeding a purely rational grasp. The alternative to this is not pure reason played out in civility, since its very contentlessness means that it lacks any basis except its option for the normlessness of the formal. As the experience of this century shows, such an option is a choice for the sway of the arbitrary or, indeed, the pure untrammeled violence only the Enlightenment can release. In this fashion, pure reason without myth turns dialectically into pure myth without reason.

Catherine Pickstock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Heidegger Again, but with a Difference

Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 474 pp.

Rüdiger Safranski's book is difficult to review: it is hard to write a critical evaluation of a masterpiece. Already a bestseller in Germany, this book is the most complete and balanced intellectual biography of Martin Heidegger, perhaps this doleful century's most controversial philosopher. Gone are the over-heated polemics of the Heidegger bashers. Gone too are his fans' convenient omissions and facile apologies. Instead — in much-needed clear, elegant, and short sentences — Safranski presents the achievements and liabilities of Heidegger as a man and a thinker. This may not be the last word on this seemingly inexhaustible subject. All worthwhile future works on the subject, however, will have to engage Safranski.

The book divides Heidegger's life and thought into three periods. The first is the least known and therefore the most fascinating. It began with Heidegger's studies as a Catholic seminarian and closed with the writing of *Being and Time*. As befits a philosopher "who criticizes any philosophy that professes to have its beginning in thought," each period had its characteristic mood (p. 1). The mood of the first period was "trust in tradition and discipline" (p. 23). Biographically, Safranski traces this mood to the young provincial's first traumatic encounter with city life in Constance. Anticipating the later distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence, the fourteen-year-old Heidegger experienced the "tension between seminary and cheerful city life, between the Catholic world and the liberal civilian environment," and developed a clear preference for the former (p. 13). This was reflected in his first publications. At the end of the 20th century, as part of the culture wars, there is a debate between the modernists and the postmodernists. But in the first decades of the century, in Germany at least, there was a vehement and wide-ranging debate between the modernists and the antimodernists. Between 1909-11, Heidegger published a number of essays in Catholic periodicals advocating the antimodernist position on religious issues. Unlike many German antimodernists, Heidegger's essays were free of anti-Semitism.

During this period, Heidegger experienced the first of what he regarded as the major events of his life: his break with the "*system* of Catholicism," i.e., the institutional Church, a move encouraged by his Protestant and vehemently anti-Semitic wife, Elfride (p. 107). He would later list anti-clericalism as one of the things that attracted him to Nazism. But it is difficult to gauge the depth of Heidegger's split with the Church. Safranski characterizes him as the "Catholic backslider," and frequently reports incidents of Heidegger's attendance at and fascination with Catholic liturgies (p. 309). His funeral was held in the tiny

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

village of Messkirch, in the same church where he was baptized.

Heidegger's fame as a philosopher predated the publication of *Being and Time*. Throughout his account of his early teaching career in Freiburg and Marburg, Safranski refers to Heidegger as the "secret king of philosophy." His kingship was not based on his publications, which were considered deficient in quantity for promotion to a full professorship at that time. Rather, it was his unconventional and charismatic lectures and seminars that attracted students from all parts of Germany, a skill that he retained throughout his life. The key to this teaching was Heidegger's ability to revivify the classic philosophical texts, particularly those of the Greeks, and relate them to the conditions of real life. Here Safranski provides an opportunity to modify the biography of another 20th century philosopher, Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse dated his association with Heidegger to reading *Being and Time* in 1927 and his subsequent move to Freiburg for postdoctoral study.[1] But, according to Safranski, Marcuse — along with his future Frankfurt School colleague, Max Horkheimer — attended Heidegger's lectures in Marburg as early as 1923.

Heidegger's second period ran from the mid-1920s, the time of the development of the themes of *Being and Time,* to the mid-1930s and his break with the Nazis. No longer motivated by tradition and discipline, his new mood was determination and decisiveness. Still professing loyalty to the phenomenological movement of his mentor, Edmund Husserl, Heidegger was working on a phenomenological analysis of *Dasein* or human existence. In fact, as Husserl was quick to realize, "Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian phenomenology are related in little more than name and motto ["To the things themselves"], and that there is scarcely even a remote family resemblance between them."[2] Perpetually stuck in first gear, Husserl, who described himself as a "beginner" and a "skilled worker on foundations," rarely got around to analyzing very many things in his series of manifestos on the virtues of phenomenology (pp. 73 and 79). Meanwhile, students flocked to the lectures of the secret king, who was actually describing experiences such as anxiety, death, guilt, freedom, authenticity, and individual existence that shook the heretofore staid German philosophical establishment. But it was his students who also first detected the vacuity at the heart of all this talk about existential immediacy. Safranski relates a joke circulating among Marburg students about Heidegger's decisionism: "I am determined, but I don't know what for" (p. 166).

The students were looking for moral or political guidance, and this is precisely what the Heidegger of *Being and Time* refused to provide: "in the existential analysis we cannot, *in principle*, discuss what *Dasein factically* resolves in

1. Herbert Marcuse and Frederick Olafson, "Heidegger's Politics: An Interview," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 6 (1977), p. 28.

2. Richard Schacht, *Hegel and After: Studies in Continental Philosophy between Kant and Sartre* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), p. 226.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any particular case. Our investigation excludes even the existential projection of the factical possibilities of existence."[3] "Heidegger's fundamental ontology, including his philosophical authenticity," Safranski argues, "are vague enough to allow for different options in political matters" (p. 168). Marcuse, for example, spent nearly five years in an attempt to fuse elements of Heidegger's philosophy with Marxism.[4] But unbeknownst to even his closest students, Heidegger was moving to his own factical political resolution. Six years after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger linked, in the words of one commentator, "his Being to the Nazis' Time."[5]

Safranski argues that Heidegger's commitment to Nazism was both an outgrowth of the vagaries of his philosophy and a violation of it. If "authenticity is intensity, nothing else," then one can gain authenticity through an intense commitment to Nazism, Marxism, vegetarianism, or anything else (p. 170). In addition to anti-clericalism, Heidegger endorsed Nazism's anti-communism, but otherwise there were few specifics. Most of all, in the Nazism of Heidegger's imagination, he expected that the Nazi revolution would lead to a renewal of "the German spirit." In order to extend this spiritual revolution to academia, Heidegger joined the Party and accepted the rectorship of the University of Freiburg. Safranski maintains that, in addition to making a factical resolution that he justified in terms of the *principles* of his philosophy, Heidegger's Nazism contradicted the thrust of all his previous work. "It is surprising that Heidegger, who until then had always wished to keep the spirit of true scholarship and philosophy free from any considerations of utility or practical orientation, is now calling for an instrumentalization of philosophy for national goals" (p. 260). Indeed, it is questionable whether Heidegger, during the brief period of his Party membership and rectorship, was much of a philosopher at all. When Karl Jaspers questioned Heidegger's support of Hitler, a man with little education, Jaspers was astonished by Heidegger's reply: "'Education is quite irrelevant . . . just look at his wonderful hands!'" (p. 232). Even the Nazis had doubts about Heidegger's probity during this period. One ideologist called him "'one of the greatest muddle-heads and eccentric recluses that we have in our university life'" (p. 280).

The failure of his rectorship was the second stake in Heidegger's life. In later years, he attributed this failure to conflicts with Nazi officials, leaving the implication that he was somehow protecting the university from unwanted political

3. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 434. The emphasis on "in principle" is mine.

4. See Herbert Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism," *Telos* 4 (Fall 1969), pp. 3-34. For a critique of this effort, see Paul Piccone and Alex Delfini, "Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism," *Telos* 6 (Fall 1970), pp. 36-46. Filled with mind-numbing jargon and contorted syntax, the Marcuse-Heidegger connection is analyzed in my "The Young Marcuse" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois-Urbana, 1979).

5. Boris Frankel, review of *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, by Herbert Marcuse, *Telos*, no. 16 (1973), p. 157.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intrusions. Carl Schmitt sarcastically referred to this stance as "'fellow-traveling as a form of resistance'" (p. 420). But here, as in so many of his postwar rationalizations, Heidegger was far from candid. Indeed, there were conflicts with Nazi officials. But these were based on Heidegger's belief that Nazi educational policy "was not revolutionary enough." By this time, Party authorities were concerned about "restoring normal practices in university teaching" that were "interested solely in the economic and technological usefulness of the universities" (p. 271). With his 1934 resignation from the rectorship, Heidegger began his gradual disentanglement from Nazism.

Before leaving this second period of Heidegger's career, the issue of anti-Semitism must be briefly addressed. Clearly, as a young man, Heidegger was not anti-Semitic. But what about the Nazi period? After the War, he denied that he was ever anti-Semitic. Safranski, however, does not accept this denial at face value. He carefully reviews Heidegger's statements about and actions toward Jews, and comes to a rather passive conclusion. For a brief period, Heidegger "allowed himself to be carried along" with Nazi anti-Semitism (p. 340). In later years, Hannah Arendt castigated Heidegger for both his Nazism and his toleration of anti-Semitism. But ever under his spell, she also blamed Heidegger's "uncleanness" on Elfride (p. 377). In lectures on Nietzsche delivered between 1936-40, Heidegger condemned biologism and racism — while still giving the Hitler salute! Salute or not, Heidegger was now under surveillance by Nazi security agencies.

Heidegger's third period began in the mid-193s and lasted the rest of his life. The new mood was imperturbability. There would be no more abortive attempts to have an impact on the real world. This was the period of Heidegger's "turn." The newly imperturbable Heidegger now questioned — but never answered — the meaning of Being. Heidegger quoted his father as often saying: "It thinks in me. I cannot resist it" (p. 315). Now the son adopted the father's intellectual receptivity and passivity. Safranski cites a sentence that "contains the whole of Heidegger's late philosophy": "'It lets Being be'" (p. 368). The Heidegger that Safranski portrays in this period is less a philosopher and more a poet, prophet, seer and oracle. Although he condemns the "hyphenated verbal monstrosities" that proliferate in this period, the quest for the meaning of Being raised, if not solved, a number of important themes (p. 150). Heidegger advocated a solicitous, not domineering, attitude towards nature, as he also warned of the dangers of technology, consumerism, commercial culture, and de-deification.

Throughout his life, Heidegger was fascinated by Greek philosophy. In his later years, he planned to visit the homeland of his philosophic heroes. In a curious parallel to Freud's fascination-revulsion with Rome, Heidegger canceled the first few trips. He feared that the reality of Greece would not live up to the Greece of his imagination. Indeed, when he finally went to Greece, he was disappointed until he found the spirit of ancient Greece on the hills of Delos. He apostrophized the moment in typical unintelligibility: "the apparently only imagined

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came to fulfillment, filling itself with presence, with what, lightened, once granted Being-present . . . to the Greeks" (p. 403).

Since this is an intellectual biography, Safranski makes no attempt to relate all of the events of Heidegger's life. Only Heidegger's Nazism and his relation with Arendt merit extensive coverage, and neither portray a very likeable *Dasein*. Arendt, "the passion of his life," was eighteen years old at the beginning of their affair (p. 136). By the standards of the increasingly anti-Semitic 1920s, this passion was highly irregular, because Arendt was Jewish. By the standards of the politically correct 1990s, it appears even worse. When the affair began, Heidegger was Arendt's thirty-five-year-old, married professor, who was simultaneously involved in a sexually unconsummated affair with another student, Elisabeth Blochmann. But apparently Heidegger was the passion of Arendt's life as well. No matter how many personal and intellectual indignities Heidegger bestowed on her, she kept in nearly constant correspondence with him. Her postwar visits with him became an annual ritual from 1967 until he died. When she finally confessed the affair to Jaspers, he replied, "Ach, but this is very exciting" (p. 374). Even the most gentlemanly and distinguished inquiring minds want to know.

A couple of incidents from Heidegger's last years soften the portrait somewhat. After completing his writing for the day, he enjoyed sharing a beer and conversation at a rural inn. He also developed an enthusiasm for a piece of commercial culture, professional soccer, which he observed via a piece of dreaded technology, his neighbor's television. When the director of the Freiburg theater tried to engage him in a discussion about art, he could not distract the oracle of Being's attention away from an analysis of soccer star Franz Beckenbauer's skills.

Finally, there are two caveats, and both concern issues and personalities on the political Left. Throughout his book, Safranski contextualizes Heidegger's thinking with that of apolitical, conservative, and Nazi theorists. This is appropriate in that these theorists constitute Heidegger's intellectual milieu. But it is also misleading by its omission of any mention — until the belated appearance of Adorno — of the rich tradition of German leftist thinkers. There were alternatives to the apoliticals, conservatives and Nazis, and a true contextualization needs to make at least brief references to these rejected or ignored alternatives. Similarly, from the beginning of the book, Safranski mentions Heidegger's anti-communism. But it is only late in the book, during the third period, that what Heidegger understood to be communism and why he objected to it becomes clear: he was anti-communist because a socialized economy entails "planning," and planning, in turn, requires the instrumentalization of reason: "calculation and examination of the given things and their transformation and reconstitution" (pp. 296 and 288). In other words, communism did not let Being be. Lest this critique gives comfort to contemporary conservative triumphalists, Heidegger was no advocate of capitalism either, which he identified with "Americanism" (p. 296).

A left thinker, Adorno, only makes an appearance late in the book. Safranski

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has an interesting, and plausible, interpretation of *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno's strident polemic against Heidegger. According to Safranski, the reason for Adorno's vehemence was an attempt to distinguish himself from a thinker — and man — that he otherwise resembled. Both despised instrumental reason and commercial culture. Both abjured any claim to truth: Heidegger through his questioning of Being, Adorno through his negative dialectics. If Heidegger's prose is frequently impenetrable, Adorno was no Hemingway as a writer. And if Heidegger engaged in backstabbing colleagues in his brief career as a Nazi activist, Adorno was not above some sabotaging of rivals.[6] But Safranski's suggestive list of similarities leaves out the most important difference between the two. Despite his pessimism, Adorno always clung to the slenderest hope of human self-liberation, while Heidegger fell into mystical despair: "*only a God can save us*" (p. 408).

But these are mere quibbles about an otherwise wonderful book. As a grad student, I spent four or five years trying to understand Heidegger. I, like many others, "regarded the ponderous as the more serious and sound" (p. 410). I finally gave up the effort, not because of any objection to Heidegger, but in frustration about my inability to comprehend him. A most irregular diarist, I marked the day with the words "dead end." Now, thanks to Safranski, I understand Heidegger, and can be retrospectively grateful that I *only* spent four or five years working on him. For political theorists, there is too much hyphenated jargon and very little substance.

John Bokina

---

6. A similar, unpleasant portrait of Adorno's character emerges in Hans Werner Henze, *Bohemian Fifths: An Autobiography*, tr. Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp, 146, 168 and 244. Safranski also notes Adorno's role in blocking the initial German publication of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back to Sanity

Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 223 pp.

Lately, a clamor can be heard, announcing that disinterested inquiry is neither possible nor desirable, that so-called "knowledge" is nothing but an expression of power, and that the concepts of evidence, objectivity, truth, are mere "ideological humbug" (p. 93). Thus, according to Richard Rorty, the champion of relativism, to call a statement true "is just to give it a rhetorical pat on the back" (p. 7), and "there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones" (p. 44). Similarly, for Sandra Harding, a leading feminist, scientific work is best begun by "thinking from women's lives" (p. 116) and "the model for good science should be research programs directed by liberatory political goals" (p. 132). In these writings, ubiquitous scare quotes around words such as "truth" and "objectivity" make clear that all meaning has been drained out of them, and that whoever refuses to recognize this must be denounced as an oppressor. Needless to say, the denigration of concern for truth signs the death warrant of the will to learn: as Francis Bacon aptly puts it in an aphorism which serves as the book's motto, it induces a "factitious despair, which . . . cuts the sinews and spurs of industry . . . all for . . . the miserable vainglory of having it believed that whatever has not yet been invented or discovered will not be invented or discovered hereafter."

Apparently, the obvious needs to be reiterated; what should be taken for granted needs to be articulated with redoubled forcefulness. Truth matters. Intellectual integrity is as epistemically essential as it is morally commendable. It is distressing that spelling this out has become such an urgent task; but the task could not have been better fulfilled than by Haack's book. Despite their variety, the eleven "unfashionable essays" that compose it have a structural unity — in counterpoint to the structural unity linking, under surface contradictions, the fashionable doctrines they criticize. Castigating the irrational dogmas which impose a growing tyranny over academic life in the humanities today, this book constitutes a fervent defense of intellectual moderation — the wise middle course, steering clear of "fads, fashions, and false dichotomies" (p. 5) where rationality always meets its doom.

Generally, Haack understands her adversaries better than they understand themselves, and she is able to sort through their contradictions, waverings and confusions, to see the part of truth, however tenuous, their positions hold. A light-handed sense of humor is woven into the fabric of an impeccable argument — in contrast to the pomposity of Rorty's pronouncements, despite all his talk of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"irony," "spirit of playfulness," and "never being able to take ourselves seriously" (p. 37). Defending the legitimacy of the search for knowledge, the respect for evidence and rational argument, is a serious matter. Truth is not a joke.

Rorty claims the pragmatist label for the view that truth is "entirely a matter of solidarity" (p. 32) and that statements like "truth is independent of the human mind" are "simply platitudes used to inculcate the common sense of the West" (p. 37). Haack, who knows pragmatism inside out, explains the distortion this self-characterization represents. For Peirce, the founder of pragmatism, the goal of all inquiry is to find truth. It implies that "inquiry" aimed at justifying some conclusion determined in advance, or solely motivated by the desire for self-aggrandizement and hence indifferent to the truth-value of what it concludes, is not inquiry at all. Similarly, truth cannot be reduced to the mere product of the inquirer's thinking. The cogency of Peirce's arguments, and the inanity of Rorty's appear in sharp contrast in the entertaining "philosophical boxing match" (p. 2) Haack stages between them by quoting from their respective texts.

Peirce's project is "to rescue the good ship Philosophy for the service of Science from the hands of lawless rovers of the sea of literature" (p. 40); Rorty would reduce both disciplines to literary genres. There is a seed of truth here: philosophical inquiry uses metaphor and linguistic innovation, and there is no denying the heuristic value of imagination in science. But this in no way warrants the conclusion that science is a "genre of literature" and philosophy a "kind of writing" (p. 39). Haack offers a penetrating analysis of the role of metaphor and imagination in inquiry. She exemplifies it by explaining her own use of the "crossword puzzle" metaphor as model for the structure of evidence. Rorty's confusion of philosophy and science with literature, which he erroneously claims to be the pragmatist view, not only destroys the possibility of any kind of inquiry, but also misprizes "the truths that literature expresses" (p. 65).

It is now a commonplace that "scientific knowledge" is merely a social construct, or that it all boils down to politics and power. According to Kenneth Gergen, "The validity of theoretical propositions in the sciences is in no way affected by factual evidence" (p. 91); while Steve Fuller boasts that he does not see any difference between "good scholarship" and "political relevance" (p. 92). "Once upon a time," Haack explains, there was the Old Deferentialist position: revering science as quasi-sacred, and taking for granted its rationality; this view assumed that there must be a uniquely rational method of inquiry exclusive to the sciences. Because of repeated failures at articulating such a method, today's New Cynics declare that science is not a rational enterprise and has nothing to do with a search for objectivity. The New Cynics' basic strategy is "to shift attention away from the normative notion of *warrant* (of how good the evidence is for this or that scientific claim) to the notion of *acceptance* (the standing of a claim in the eyes of the relevant community)" (p. 92).

Science is obviously a social enterprise, and Haack shows how scientific

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inquiry is advanced by "the cooperative and competitive engagement of many people, within and across generations" (p. 104). But this is not what the New Cynics mean: focusing exclusively on *acceptance* at the expense of *warrant*, they view science as a thoroughly political institution where all the weight is carried by prejudice and propaganda, none by evidence. From there it follows that social values are the determining factor in the acceptance of a scientific theory; that the goal of science is the improvement of society; that scientific knowledge and even reality are the product of social negotiation, or of the play of social forces; that science should be more democratic; that the natural sciences are subordinate to sociology. The legitimacy of this shift of focus from warrant to acceptance is often defended by what Haack calls the "passes for" fallacy: since what has passed for true has often turned out to be untrue, the notion of truth — and the correlative notions of warrant, evidence, knowledge, reality — must be viewed as mere ideological productions. Such an inference is self-defeating as well as fallacious: the sociological investigations which allegedly prove that science is nothing but a social product could themselves be nothing but a social product, thereby lacking credibility. No evidence can be produced to buttress a thesis that denies the very notion of evidence.

There is, Haack explains, a *good* kind of sociology of science. It looks at its object not simply as "a social institution, but a social institution *engaged in inquiry*, attempting to discover how the world is, to devise explanatory theories that stand up in the face of evidence" (p. 99). In other words, it keeps acceptance "appropriately correlated with warrant" (p. 110). It explains what conditions, both in the internal organization of science and in its external environment, can hamper or foster honest and thorough scientific work; but it does not confound rational activity with the conditions which make it possible. Knowing that social realities are not made up by sociologists (any more than the physical world is a creation of physicists), it applies to itself the rule of the primacy of evidence.

The idea that inquiry should be politicized has been adopted by a number of academic feminists and multiculturalists, who claim that to think otherwise is to betray complicity with sexism and racism. All theories are now supposed to be read as products of Western culture — heretofore largely the work of white heterosexual men who have, in the service of *their* interests, made *their* way of thinking the standard of *true* thought. It is time to reclaim power for the groups whose oppressed status has been masked and hence prolonged by such productions, examples of which can be found not only in the content of this or that theory, but in the very concept of objective truth.

The feminist version of this analysis (which copies the basic pattern of Marx's critique of ideology, extending it in directions other than what Marx had in mind) translates into the bizarre ideas of "feminist epistemology" and "feminist science." The Old Feminism, which stressed "the common humanity of women and men" and fought for justice, has been supplanted in recent years by an "ambitious, imperialist feminism" which stresses the "woman's point of view"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and "claims revolutionary significance for all areas of philosophy" (p. 123). Allegedly, there is a specifically female "way of knowing," that a male-dominated science and a male-dominated epistemology have hitherto conspired to deny. Fed by the New Cynicism, the New Feminism claims that "feminist values" should now determine what theories are accepted and that "knowledge" should now serve women's interests. Haack notes that "feminist philosophy" (including "feminist epistemology") offers both a "dreary uniformity" and a "confusing diversity" (p. 186). While the claim that the "feminist perspective" will revolutionize epistemology and science is repeated as an incantation, a plethora of mutually incompatible ideas is proposed as defining such a perspective. Priding themselves on attaching no value to rationality or objectivity, the proponents of this view are not disturbed by these irreconcilable differences, any more than by the total lack of accomplishments of so-called "feminist science."

Haack readily admits that science as a social institution is not free from prejudices, which need to be uprooted if good science is to be done. In this regard, feminist criticisms of sexist science can play "a minor but bona fide epistemological role" (p. 131). But they can only play it if the notions of evidence, truth and objectivity are not themselves dismissed as manifestations of prejudice. If objectivity is nothing but an ideological illusion, the research that establishes bias in scientific research is itself biased and hence unreliable; furthermore, there is no way of knowing "objectively" what theories advance women's interests, or even what women's interests are. Like social constructivists of every feather, feminists who cannot see the difference between prejudice and genuine inquiry "are sawing through the branch on which they sit" (p. 93). By embracing the old stereotypes about women being intuitive and emotional rather than logical, and claiming that science should be infused with "feminine values," they reveal themselves to be part of the problem

Some "feminist epistemologists" place their critique of "masculinist" epistemologies under the general umbrella of "multiculturalism," which is supposed to be the only acceptable response to cultural and racist prejudices. Haack carefully clarifies the differences between the various competing conceptions of multiculturalism. She obviously does not deny that learning about cultures other than one's own is a desirable objective, in education and elsewhere; or that persons of different cultural backgrounds are to be treated with respect. But this does not mean that all cultural practices, opinions or traditions are equivalent; or that persons should be defined exclusively by some "group identity" which effaces both their individuality and their partaking in a common humanity. The new "counterculturalism" refuses to privilege so-called "Western culture" over "cultures" (identified in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation) regarded as oppressed and marginalized. Thus, either there is no norm by which to bear judgment on cultural productions (relativism), or non-Western cultures are the only bearers of norm because they have been denigrated or suppressed (tribalism). Focusing on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the epistemological aspects of this doctrine, Haack pulls apart the dogma underlying both its relativist and its tribalist versions: that "truth" is a function of cultural context. She also points out the absurdity of supposing that race, gender, or sexual orientation can identify an epistemic community.

There is a strong ethical component to Haack's analysis. Along with concern for truth comes concern for justice; and when the concept of objectivity is emptied of its meaning, moral norms disappear together with epistemic norms. For the New Feminists, "humanity" is split into two genders. There is no "truth" that is true for both; the very idea of truth is an ideological construct devised by men to oppress women. How could "justice" or "right" have any objective meaning? The only thing left is power: *might* is right. The point is not to fight injustice, but to turn the tables. The days of male-dominated science, philosophy, and ethics, are allegedly over; "women's ways" of thinking, knowing, doing and being, now have the upper hand. A parallel analysis can be developed regarding the ethical implications of radical multiculturalism. "Humanity" is fragmented into a multitude of groups without any common bond; each one has its own standards, its own "ways of knowing," none more valid objectively than the next. It is time to reclaim power — the "right" to decide what is "true" for the groups whose "ways of knowing" have been repressed. Such an attitude undermines any effort to rectify any real wrongs that have been committed.

Haack's reflections on affirmative action and on the practical organization of academic life extend her analysis of feminist and multiculturalist theories. The advocates of preferential hiring on the basis of gender or race in academia are sometimes motivated by the laudable goals of promoting tolerance and repairing past injustices. They do not realize, however, how counterproductive it is to go about achieving these goals by locking individuals in their gender or race, calling this their identity and their qualification for teaching positions. In a very detailed and balanced analysis, Haack suggests possible solutions grounded in *justice* — not the desire to replace the "old, corrupt system" by a "new, corrupt system" (p. 185) in which one finds one's own advantage.

Haack's book strikes at the "This-or-Nothingism" which precludes finding solutions to *any* problem. There *is* a middle course between sacralizing science and claiming that science carries no epistemic value; between reducing philosophy to science and reducing it to a kind of writing; between denying the social dimension of scientific work and calling scientific knowledge a mere social construct; between hiring professors on the basis of gender or race, and denying the problems which preferential hiring purports to solve. Why are extreme theses so appealing? The answer often lies in the greed for power of those who propound them. An extreme position often originates in an awareness of the flaws of the opposite extreme position, coupled with an inability to think other than in a binary type of logic. While pulling apart the faulty inferences this way of thinking inevitably generates, Haack proposes ways of correcting the problems that have been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

identified without falling from Scylla into Charybdis. In some cases, she notes that the extreme position in question has itself the merit of attempting to find a middle ground between two other extreme positions. For instance, the view that standards of evidence are relative to context or community constitutes an attempt to overcome the dilemma between the two traditionally rival theories of epistemic justification, foundationalism and coherentism; but there *is* a way to overcome this dilemma without embracing the excesses of contextualism.

One of the most lamentable effects of the feminist claims about women's special "ways of knowing" and unique insights into the ideological nature of the concept of truth in Western philosophy is that they obliterate the *real* qualities that talented women, like talented men, have to offer philosophy. Among these qualities, Haack enumerates "logical acumen, textual sensitivity, creative imagination, analytic rigor, conceptual subtlety and penetration" (p. 175). All of these are highly exemplified by her essays. A devastating critique of current intellectual nihilism, the book is driven by a fundamentally positive purpose: to serve as a step on the path back to "the calm sunlight of the mind" (p. 5) — "Hume's marvelous phrase for rational thought" (p. 211).

Sophie Berman

Transcendental Sophistry

Peter A. Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare: An Introduction to Transcendental Sophistry* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 1997), 187 pp.+xiv.

Something has gone seriously wrong with contemporary philosophy. Philosophy today has become a catalogue of competing alternative theories, each striving for internal consistency, but unable to accomplish anything more. Somehow, however, philosophy matters. When philosophy ails, so do all the other disciplines. They all depend on philosophy to demarcate and justify the various orders of knowledge. If philosophy can offer no justification for truth claims, there are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only the words of those who enjoy status, credentials and power.

In *Cartesian Nightmare*, Peter Redpath explains how culture has reached this stage of crisis. In the opening chapter, he presents, in chilling Orwellian terms today's cultural confusion. Since nothing external determines any longer the content of knowledge, culture has become the criteria for "truth" and "goodness." In this view, once the constraints of tradition break down, the mind is free to betray the formal character of each order of knowledge, leading to the disciplinary irrationalism rampant in today's academy.

Why has this come to pass? Why is Western culture seized by irrationalism? Redpath blames it on sophistry and other anti-philosophical traditions. Western Civilization is losing its self-understanding for want of philosophy, not for lack of economics, science, or technology. The West no longer understands what philosophy is, what it means to be a rational human being. Redpath is alarmed by the anti-Socratic character of this situation. He explains it as a result of a pernicious sophistry that emerged at the tail end of the Renaissance. By Descartes' time, philosophy was largely dead. To elevate the status of their own disciplines and to deconstruct scholastic theology, Renaissance humanists spread an apocryphal notion of philosophy. Supposedly, only someone of exceptionally strong will, a theological poet, has the power to grasp this hidden doctrine. The first modern histories of philosophy were written by Renaissance humanists.[1]

Over the years, Cartesian scholars have been frustrated by the fact that Descartes says so little about what he means by "clear and distinct ideas." Redpath, however, does explain it. Descartes' dream of a science of clear and distinct ideas is to be understood as a reaction to the sophistic claims of Renaissance rhetoricians that nature is a book and philosophy is a hidden teaching that only poets and rhetoricians have the power to comprehend. According to Redpath, in his first work, *Compendium of Music*, Descartes sought to limit clarity to what falls within the range of an undisturbed reason — a reason that does not wander above or below its powers.[2] Redpath sees this as a reaction to the wandering poetic imagination to which Renaissance humanists appealed as their authority. Descartes stabilizes this imagination through an exercise of self-persuasion of pure reason and will — in short, an act of transcendental sophistry.

By allowing his acculturated imagination to trick him into accepting a truth lower than the light of pure reason as a clear and distinct idea, through successive days of meditating, Descartes liberates pure reason from its previous cultural chains and locates truth in a will overpowered by pure reason. In this way, knowledge for Descartes becomes tantamount to a divine illumination. Since by

---

1. Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 331-337.

2. René Descartes, *Compendium of Music* (*Compendium musicae*), tr. by Walter Robert, Introduction by Charles Kent (Bloomington, IN: American Institute of Musicology, 1961), pp. 11-13.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Descartes' time philosophy was largely dead, Redpath maintains that Descartes could not have understood its nature. He mistook the sophistry of Renaissance humanists for the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Redpath compares Descartes' hunt for one method to know all truth in his *Discourse on Method* to Socrates' depiction of the sophist in the *Gorgias*.

While the humanists were obsessed with the *trivium*, the venerable curriculum of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, Descartes's attention turned to the *quadrivium*, to the newer trends in the 16th and 17th century curriculum of music, astronomy, geometry, and arithmetic. Since Descartes mistook philosophy for sophistry, Redpath claims that Descartes focused on Renaissance humanism, decadent scholasticism, and his own imagination to transcend the sophistry of his age. Descartes evidently knew Galileo's retort to the Renaissance humanists in *The Assayer*: without the language of mathematics, (1) the book of nature cannot be read; and (2) one wanders in a dark labyrinth.[3] Descartes concludes that in the *quadrivium*, with its emphasis on mathematical ways of knowing, he could found a new language to read the book of nature and solve the problem of skepticism. In a bold stroke, Descartes pits the *quadrivium* against the *trivium* and routs humanists and scholastics unable to find a substitute for Descartes's new mathematical-like criteria of knowledge: clear and distinct ideas.

To strengthen his solution, in six days of meditation, analogous to the six days of creation, Descartes recreates himself anew as a being of pure reason in direct communion with the idea of God, whose nature and existence is, of all ideas, that which is most clear and distinct. As such, Descartes makes his new solution to the problem of skepticism and his defeat of alternative Renaissance schools a matter of divine inspiration and authority. All clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed by the idea of God whose own clarity and distinctness illumines and authorizes all knowledge.

Redpath concludes by examining the consequences of the unhappy history of post-Cartesian sophistry. Lacking a real foundation, Descartes' "solution" is short-lived. Different thinkers try, to no avail, to patch up the holes in his dream of science as a system of clear and distinct ideas. Cartesianism comes full circle. The problem of skepticism remains, except now it attends a postmodern, not a Renaissance, malaise. Actually, today's malaise is not postmodern at all, just the inevitable logical development of the consequences of modern sophistry. The moral is that philosophers today face the same battle that Socrates fought in the fifth century B.C.: to combat sophists.

Curtis L. Hancock

---

3. Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*, tr. by Stillman Drake, in Stillman Drake, *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 237 ff.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now available in English:

Luciano Pellicani

The Genesis of Capitalism and the Origins of Modernity

translated by James G. Colbert

Widely acclaimed in Europe, Luciano Pellicani's classic work on the origins of capitalism is now finally available in English. Through a careful reconstruction of the historical trajectory of capitalism, Pellicani confronts not only the Marxist and the Weberian conventional wisdom about the historical preconditions for capitalist development, but most of the vast literature on the subject to demonstrate how political freedom rather than religious, climatic, geographical and other contributing factors was the essential precondition for capitalist development. This epoch-making phenomenon is examined in terms of the cultural context of Renaissance Europe and related to the concomitant development of modernity and its antinomies.

Beginning with the Reformation and Weber's mythological account of Calvinism, Pellicani painstakingly examines all the major explanations of the phenomenon to build an argument for an open society as the one most conducive to social, economic and political well-being. The appendix carefully examines the development of capitalism in Japan to indicate how such a Eurocentric model is applicable to other societies as well.

228 pages

Hardcover: $ 24
Paperback: $ 16

Telos Press Ltd.
431 E. 12th Street
New York, NY 10009
212-228-6479 fax: 212-228-6379 e-mail: telospress@aol.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RECENT BACK ISSUES

No. 114:

BENOIST: What is Racism? ***KOENEN:*** The Real History of Anti-Fascism and Anti-Bolshevism ***ZASLAVSKY***: The Katyn Massacre ***WILLIAMS***: Dialogical Theories of Justice ***BASSANI***: The Europeanization of American Politics ***SYMPOSIUM ON THE KOSOVO CRISIS:*** Contributions by ***ADLER, ZIPES, BERMAN, CRNKOVIC, PICCONE, GOTTFRIED,*** and ***RITTERSPORN; GRAGLIA:*** Judicial Hubris ***WEGIERSKI***: The Canadian Predicament

No. 113: Toward a Liturgical Critique of Modernity

BERMAN: Creation and Culture ***PICCONE:*** Liturgy vs. Modernity ***PICKSTOCK:*** Liturgy and Modernity ***MILBANK:*** Community, Gift and Liturgy ***MCMYLOR:*** The Formation of Modernity ***BOTWINICK:*** Religion and Secularism ***GOTTFRIED:*** Liturgy and Postmodernism ***ADAMS:*** Benjamin on Liturgy ***KARNOOUH:*** What Remains of 1968? ***KALYVAS:*** The Origins of Autonomy ***BAUMAN:*** Death as Industry ***BENDERSKY:*** Schmitt and Heller ***PICCONE:*** Multicultural Homogenization

No. 112: The Fate of Modernity

PELLICANI: Modernity and Totalitarianism ***DELFINI & PICCONE:*** Modernity, Libertarianism and Critical Theory ***DAHL:*** Localism and Nationalism in Midwestern Populism ***NORRIS:*** Schmitt on Friends, Enemies and the Political ***KING:*** Baudrillard's Nihilism ***MARANGUDAKIS:*** Ecology as Pseudo-Religion? ***CONVERSI:*** Spanish Federalism and the 1978 Constitution ***WEISSBERG:*** Academic Deception for Fun & Profit ***PICKSTOCK:*** Rethinking the Self ***BENOIST:*** Nazism and Communism

No. 111:The Crisis of Education

PAN: The Future of Education ***LUKE:*** Universities and Specialization ***GESHEKTER:*** Education in California ***TAVES:*** The New Fragmentation ***GOTTFRIED:*** Education and Administration ***PAN:*** The End of the University? ***ALLEN & AXIOTIS:*** Nietzsche on the Future of Education ***PICCONE:*** The End of Public Education? ***EZE:*** Communication and Cultural Hegemony ***WEGIERSKI:*** The Reform Party in Canada ***GOTTFRIED:*** Liberalism and the "Fascist" Comeback ***FAVRO:*** The Return of Geopolitics?

No. 110:

TATE: The Hermeneutic Circle vs. the Enlightenment ***PELS:*** Fascism and the Primacy of the Political ***BENOIST:*** Hayek: A Critique ***JACHEC:*** Adorno, Greenberg and Modernist Politics ***KARNOOUH:*** Interculturalism and Multiculturalism ***LANGIULLI:*** On Strange Standpoints ***D'AMICO:*** On *Telos* 108 ***GONZALES:*** Liberalism vs. Populism ***SOKOLOWSKI:*** Theology and Deconstruction ***PICKSTOCK:*** Postmodern Theology? ***TUCKER:*** Intellectual Irresponsibility

Subscriptions: $40 per year (4 issues) for individuals (institutions: $95). Special double issues are $18 (institutions: $45). Foreign orders add 15%. Checks must be in US funds. Back issues: $14 each (institutions: $30). Back issues available: 13, 17-18, 20-51, 53-112. For subscriptions, back issues etc., write: Telos Press Ltd., 431 E. 12th Street, New York, NY 10009. Ph: 212-228-6479. Fax: 212-228-6379. e-mail: telospress@aol.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED